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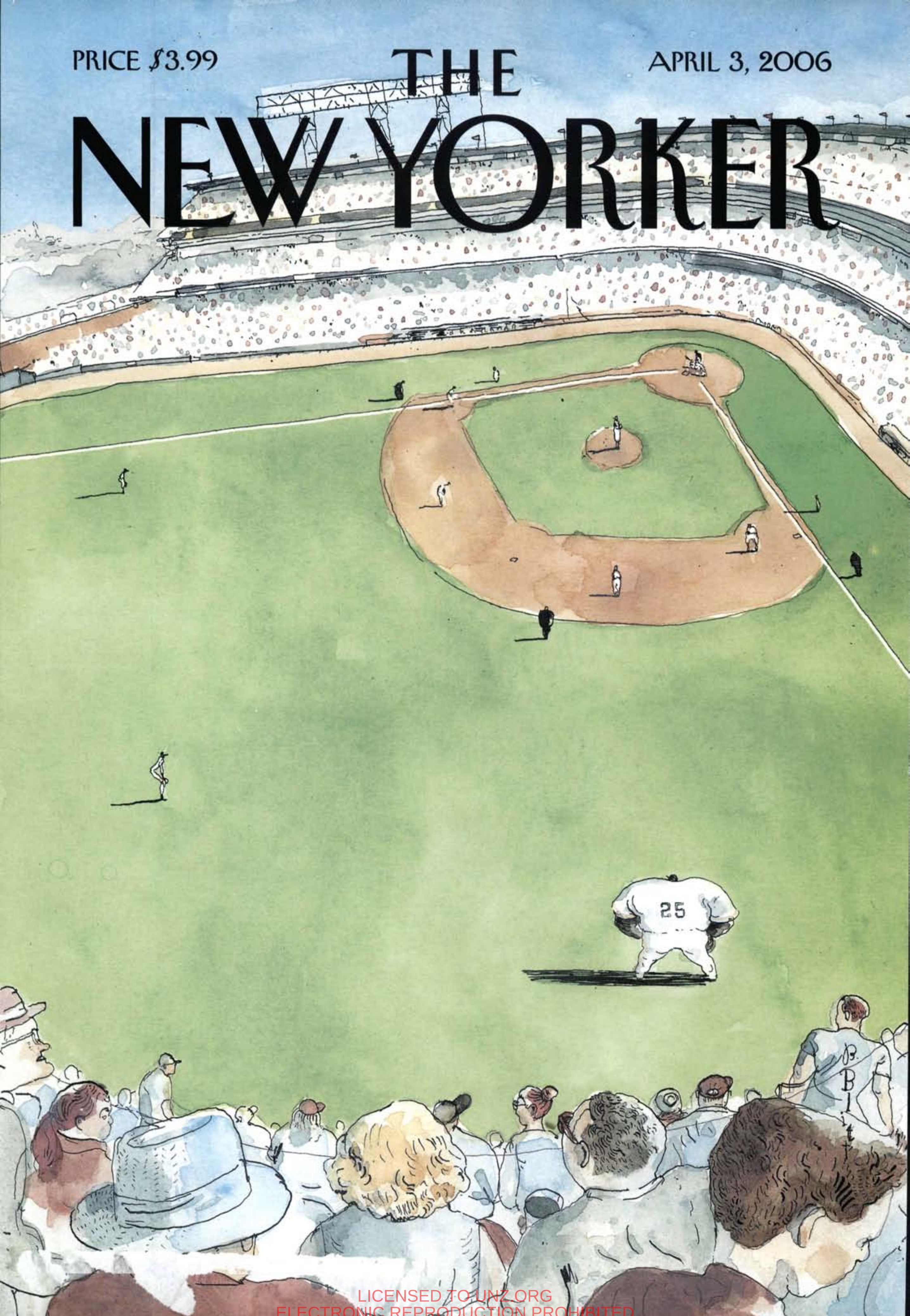

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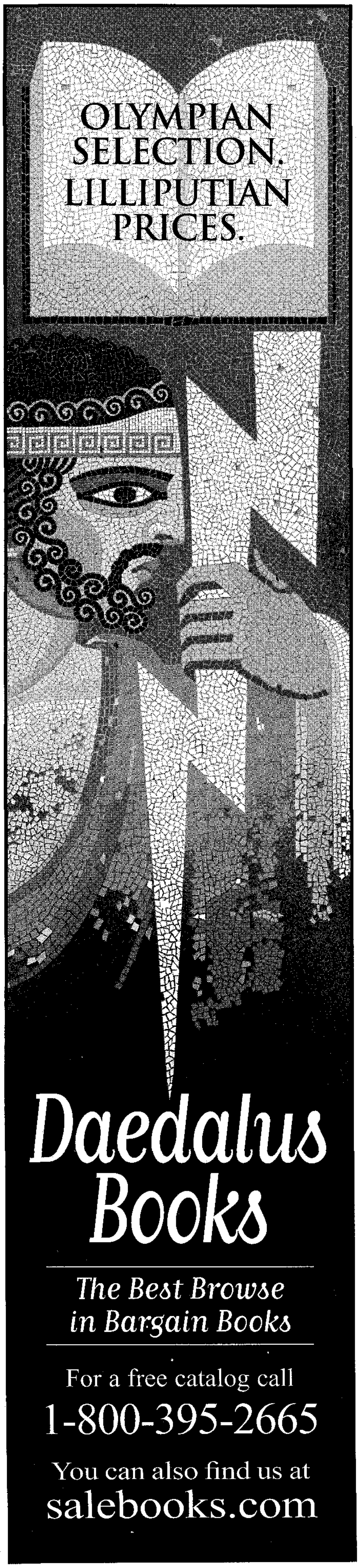

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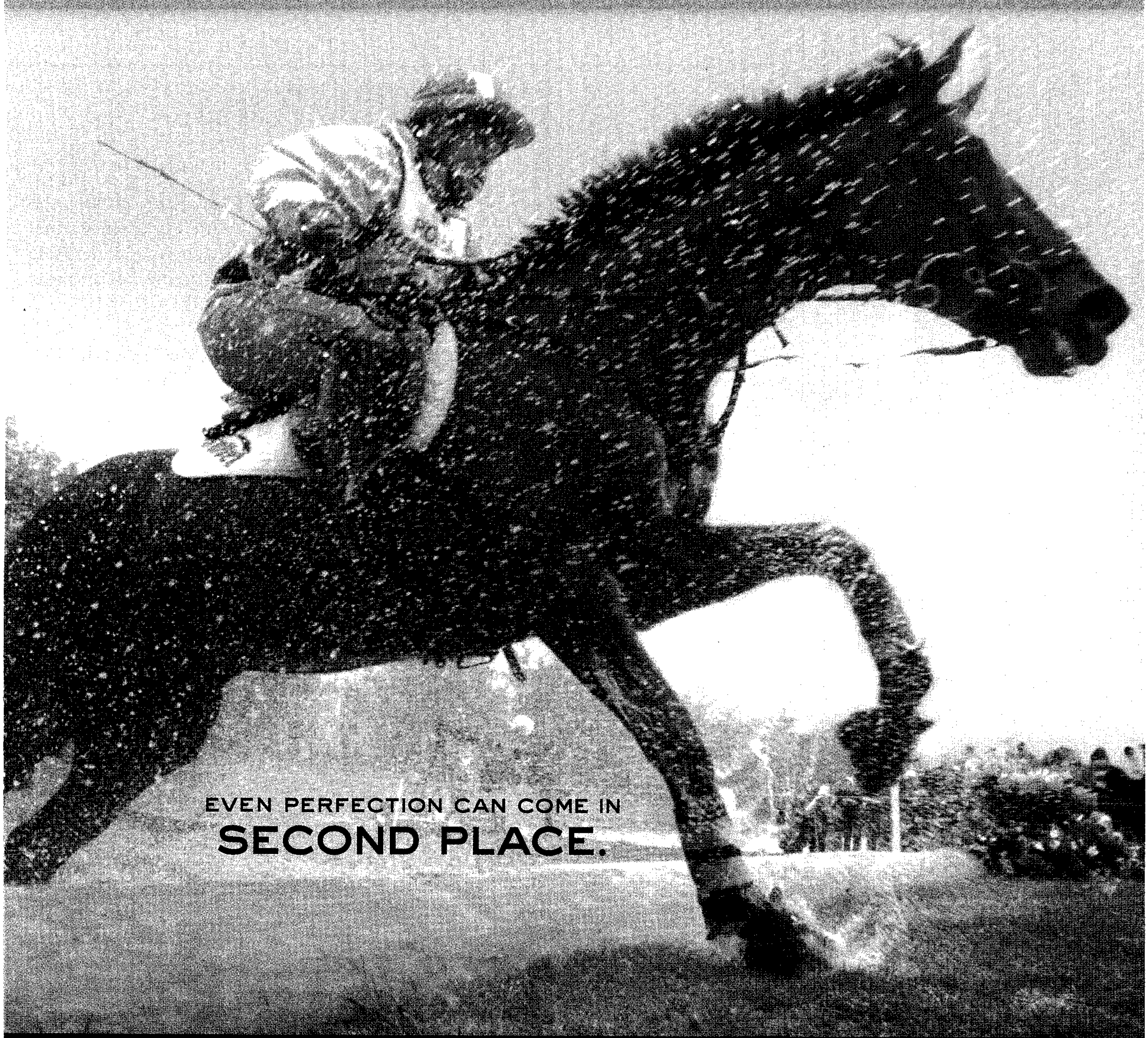
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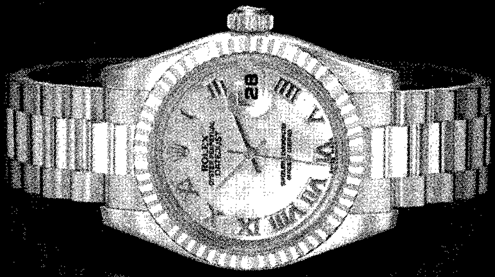

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THIS WEEK'S
WEB EXCLUSIVE:

Alice Quinn talks about Elizabeth Bishop and reads selections from "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box," a new volume of Bishop's uncollected poems, drafts, and fragments.

THE HARD DRIVE
An archive of hundreds of past Web exclusives, including Q. & A.s, cover galleries, slide shows, Web sightings, and more.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jane Kramer ("The Dutch Model," p. 60) writes the Letter from Europe for the magazine. Her most recent book about Europe is "The Politics of Memory."

Steve Coll (Comment, p. 27), a staff writer, won a Pulitzer Prize for "Ghost Wars," a book about the C.I.A. and Afghanistan, which is available in paperback.

Jerome Groopman ("Being There," p. 34) is the Recanati Professor at Harvard. His new book, on clinical decision-making, will be published next year.

John Cassidy ("Relatively Deprived," p. 42) is a staff writer.

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James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 33) writes about business and finance for the magazine.

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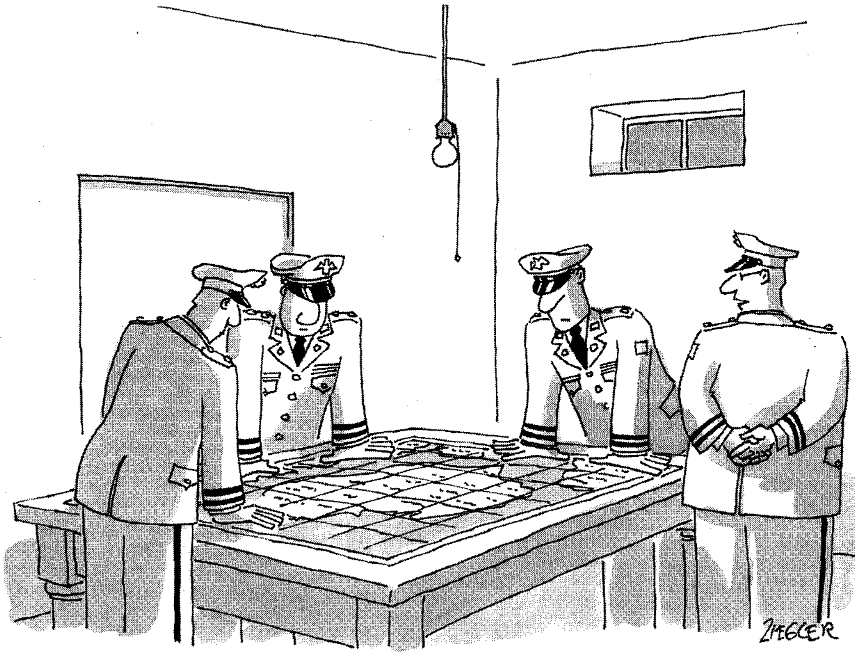
Elizabeth Macklin (Poem, p. 38) has published two collections of poems, including "You've Just Been Told." ♦



"The situation in Iraq appears to be going well, gentlemen. That, however, is a map of Staten Island."

THE MAIL

RECLAIMING THE COAST

Geologic history and public policy, as Elizabeth Kolbert notes, may lead to the slow drowning of the Louisiana coast ("Watermark," February 27th). But there is hope. Local experts have been developing some promising solutions over the past few decades. Cutter-head dredges can harvest sediments from river bottoms or offshore sources to be placed in areas of degraded marsh or shallow open water, and the newly created marshes can be sustained with small diversions of fresh water from the Mississippi River, a technique known as pipeline sediment delivery. Louisiana marshes protect one of the largest shipping and fuel corridors in the United States and provide nurseries for a variety of aquatic species; the two million people who live in the coastal zone also depend on these wetland habitats to support a unique culture. Mississippi River sediments have conquered the natural subsidence rates in south Louisiana for ten thousand years, and they still can.
Kerry M. St.Pé
Program Director, Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program
Thibodaux, La.

MR. SHAWN AND MR. CAPOTE

In his review of the film "Capote," David Denby indicates that the filmmakers used the character of William Shawn, the editor of *The New Yorker* during the period depicted in the film, as "an aggressive force who moves the plot along" (The Current Cinema, October 10th). As William Shawn's sons, we would like to amplify Denby's comment by noting, for the record, that in surface detail and in substance the William Shawn depicted in "Capote" is invented out of whole cloth by the filmmakers. In the film, Shawn speaks of "building interest" in Capote's piece, organizes a book reading for the writer at which he introduces him personally, arranges to have Richard Avedon go out to Kansas to photograph the author and the two murderers, and flies out to Kansas himself to visit with Capote. The real-life William Shawn did not believe that articles or their authors should be publicized. He resisted even putting a table of contents in the magazine itself to trumpet what each issue contained. He never organized a reading for Capote or any other writer, and never addressed one, as he never spoke in public on any occasion. He didn't arrange Richard Avedon's photographic trips or publish any photographs by Avedon, as he didn't think there should be photographs in *The New Yorker*. The film's Shawn expresses rapt interest in the details of the crime Capote wrote about, whereas the actual Shawn found even the mention of blood disturbing, and, much as he revered Capote's writing, found editing "In Cold Blood" upsetting. Quiveringly empathic by nature, the real William Shawn was literally the last man on earth who would make a joke about the killer Perry's impending death, as the character Shawn in the film does. The real Shawn never went to Kansas to visit with Capote, and in fact he never had the experience of flying on an airplane.
Allen and Wallace Shawn
Bennington, Vt., and New York City

LAW AND THE LITTLE GUY

Janet Malcolm makes the startling assertion that "the cases that are the glory of Supreme Court history are the cases where the little guy won; the cases that are its shame are those where he lost" ("The Art of Testifying," March 13th). The problem with well-intentioned justices who ignore the words of the Constitution in order to help the "little guy" is that the definition of "little guy" is far more changeable, and thus unjust, than are the pendulum swings of the constitutional pundits.
David Lebedoff
Minneapolis, Minn.

•

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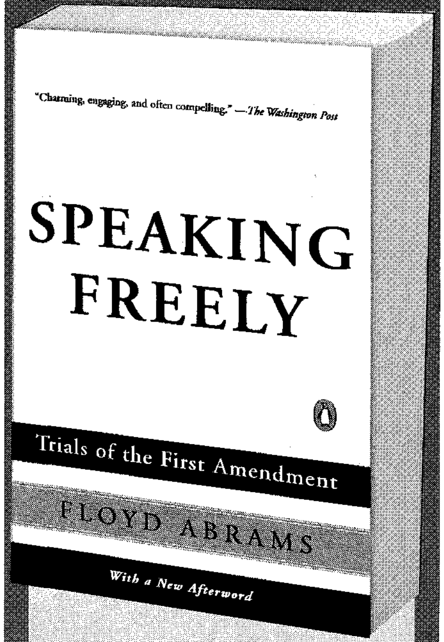
THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH—
30 years of courtroom battles from America's preeminent First Amendment litigator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The Orchid Show at the New York Botanical Garden. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
BRONX TALE

Clifford Odets, the playwright and screenwriter who wrote the 1957 noir classic "The Sweet Smell of Success," was also the inspiration for John Turturro's title character in the Coen brothers' dark comedy "Barton Fink." Odets's first play, "Awake and Sing!" (1935), widely considered his masterpiece, portrays a Depression-era Bronx family dreaming of better days. The Lincoln Center Theatre production is in previews at the Belasco Theatre. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
BLOOD DRIVE

Nearly thirty years ago, James (Blood) Ulmer turned jazz guitar on its head with a style equally informed by the Delta blues, Jimi Hendrix, and the it's-all-good musical philosophy of Ornette Coleman's harmolodic theory. More recently, he's deepened his relationship with the music of the rural South, and this week he takes over the Jazz Standard, playing the blues solo and with the Memphis Blood band. But just to keep it clear where he's coming from he's also reconvening his roughhousing jazz trio, Odyssey. (See page 13.)

ART
FAMILY TRADITION

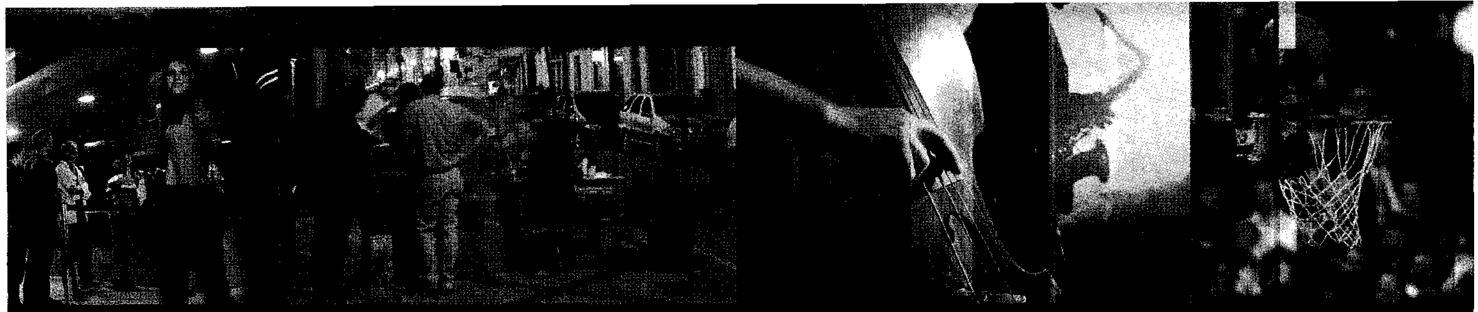
This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Asia Society, which celebrates the occasion with "A Passion for Asia: The Rockefeller Family Collects," a show honoring its patrons. (See page 14.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
TEACHER'S PET

Alice Coote, a rising young British mezzo-soprano whose voice has been compared to that of her teacher, Dame Janet Baker, sings songs by Mahler and Schubert at Alice Tully Hall. (See page 19.)

MOVIES
WATERS OF BABYLON

In a four-day series of films about Israel, BAM will show such rarities as Chris Marker's 1960 documentary, "Description of a Struggle"; "The Juggler," a 1953 drama that was one of the first American movies to be filmed in Israel; Susan Sontag's contemplative report on the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War in 1973, "Promised Lands"; and Otto Preminger's epic "Exodus." (See page 22.)



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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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AWAKE AND SING!
Clifford Odets's 1935 drama focusses on a Jewish family in the Bronx during the Depression. Starring Lauren Ambrose, Ben Gazzara, Mark Ruffalo, and Zoë Wanamaker. In previews. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

BASED ON A TOTALLY TRUE STORY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new play by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, about a young comic-book writer on the verge of fame. In previews. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE CATARACT
The Women's Project presents Lisa D'Amour's play about a Midwestern couple who take in a pair of Southerners. In previews. Opens April 2. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE DROWSY CHAPERONE
A new meta-musical, about a theatre fan in reverie over his favorite musical, starring Bob Martin and Sutton Foster. Previews begin April 3. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

FESTEN
The American première of a play by David Eldridge, adapted from the 1998 Dogme film "The Celebration," starring Larry Bryggman, Jeremy Sisto, Michael Hayden, Ali MacGraw, and Julianna Margulies. In previews. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

HELL
A new opera by Michael Webster and Eileen Myles examines the post-9/11 media culture. Opens March 31. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101.)

A JEW GROWS IN BROOKLYN
An autobiographical musical comedy about the family of the playwright Jake Ehrenreich (who also stars). In previews. (American Theatre of Actors, 314 W. 54th St. 212-352-3101.)

LANDSCAPE OF THE BODY
Signature Theatre Company presents a play by John Guare, set in nineteen-seventies Greenwich Village, starring Lili Taylor and Sherie Rene Scott. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

LESTAT
The new musical based on Anne Rice's "Vampire Chronicles" features music by Elton John and lyrics by Bernie Taupin. In previews. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

PEN
Playwrights Horizons presents the world première of a new play by David Marshall Grant, starring J. Smith-Cameron. In previews. Opens April 2. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A SAFE HARBOR FOR ELIZABETH BISHOP
A new play by Marta Góes, about the poet's romance with the Brazilian architect Lota de Macedo Soares, with Amy Irving in the title role. In previews. Opens March 30. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

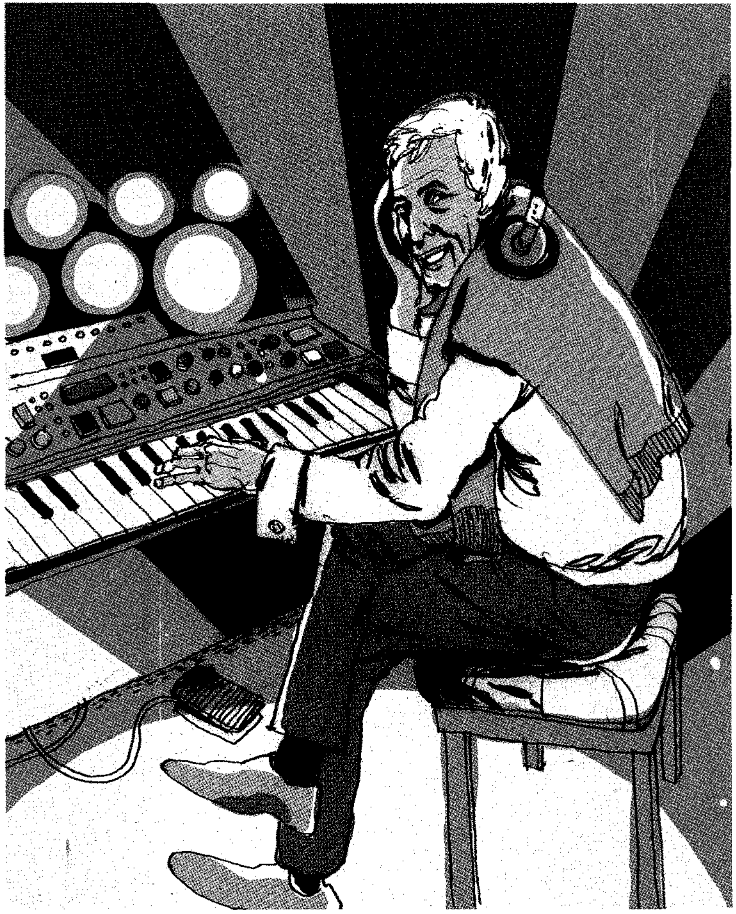
SANDRA BERNHARD: EVERYTHING BAD AND BEAUTIFUL
The audacious comedian has a new show. In previews. (Daryl Roth, 101 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

SHOW PEOPLE
A new play by Paul Weitz, about two Broadway actors who haven't acted in years. Directed by Peter Askin. In previews. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

STUFF HAPPENS
David Hare's drama about the Iraq war has its New York première at the Public. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. In previews. (425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

TARZAN
Disney's version of Edgar Rice Burroughs's classic story comes to Broadway. With a book by David Henry Hwang and music by Phil Collins. Bob Crowley directs. In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.)

THREE DAYS OF RAIN
Julia Roberts, Paul Rudd, and Bradley Cooper star in a revival of Richard Greenberg's drama about siblings who unearth secrets about their late father. In previews. (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)



The composer Burt Bacharach plays the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill.

THE THREEPENNY OPERA
The Roundabout Theatre Company presents the operetta by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, adapted by Wallace Shawn. Starring Alan Cumming, Cyndi Lauper, and Nellie McKay. Scott Elliott directs. In previews. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

TRYST
In Karoline Leach's romantic thriller, set in Edwardian England, a con man focusses his attentions on a shopgirl. In previews. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE WEDDING SINGER
A musical based on the 1998 movie, about a wedding singer who falls in love with a bride-to-be in New Jersey in the eighties. John Rando directs. Previews begin March 30. (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

WELL
Lisa Kron's comedy, which makes its Broadway début after a successful run at the Public in 2004, explores the conventional wisdom of wellness. Leigh Silverman directs. In previews. Opens March 30. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

CYCLONE
For Mitch (Hamish Linklater), a mangy slacker who carries his father's ashes around in a plastic mug, the coping mechanisms for grief include pulling a gun on a convenience-store clerk and a halfhearted attempt at poisoning the neighbor's dog. His wiry, lonesome girlfriend (Marin Ireland), who works at a doughnut shop despite her nearly ontological aversion to doughnuts, bears the brunt of his malaise, and she longs for an escape. Set in a banal world of Slim Jims, lawn flamingos, and New Jersey pit stops, this story of working-class nihilism seems like an odd-fitting tenant for Studio Dante, Michael Imperioli's opulent jewel box of a theatre, but Ron Fitzgerald's bleak comedy pulls you deep into its sooty, broken heart. (257 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE EMPEROR JONES
In the Wooster Group's production of Eugene O'Neill's expressionistic play from 1920, the astonishing Kate Valk plays the title character, Brutus Jones, in blackface. In ways that are both brave and sweetly foolhardy, the director, Elizabeth LeCompte, makes it clear that Jones is a white man's idea of a Negro. Along the way, she wrests a great performance from Valk, who, seated in a wheelchair, with microphone in hand, conveys Jones's rage, wit, and wiles mostly through her voice and her eyes, the whites of which are made all the whiter by the thick black makeup that coats her face like a minstrel-show nightmare. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/27/06.) (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Through April 2.)

FRAGMENT
Classic Stage presents a work drawn from fragments of the lost plays of Sophocles and Euripides. (136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200.)

GEORGE M. COHAN TONIGHT!
A bronze statue of Cohan, consummate American showman and composer of "Over There," "Give My Regards to Broadway," and countless other tunes, stands in the center of Times Square's theatre district; in portraying him, Jon Peterson ("Cabaret") has big tap shoes to fill. Saddled with some three dozen of Cohan's songs and armed simply with a bow tie and a cane, Peterson paints Chip Deffaa's sepia-toned biographical revue with exuberant colors. Deffaa, a former entertainment critic for the New York *Post* and a devoted Cohan buff, may not be interested in deconstructing his idol, but, thanks to Peterson's delightful, rubbery-voiced performance, he successfully summons Cohan's enduring appeal as an entertainer. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

JACQUES BREL IS ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN PARIS
Gordon Greenberg directs this revival of the 1968 musical celebrating the poetic Belgian composer. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-239-6200.)

LIVING ROOM IN AFRICA
In the Edge Theatre's première of a play by Bathsheba Doran, Marie (Ana Reeder) is an English novelist who takes up residence in southeast Africa looking for artistic fuel; her companion, Edward (Rob Campbell), is building an art gallery that he hopes might bring some inspiration (and employment) to the local community. But most of the villagers are dying, fast, of AIDS, and Marie develops an obsessive altruism toward them. Her bleeding-heart generosity would seem sanctimonious were it not for

JOSH COCHRAN

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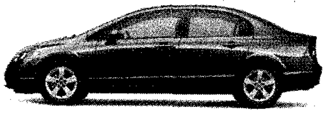

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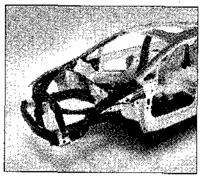

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
SOVIET SOUNDTRACKS

"Sonata for Viola," a film portrait of Dmitri Shostakovich, was completed in the Soviet Union in 1981 and then banned there. Now available here on DVD, it bears the authority of the deepest affection. For the two directors, Alexander Sokurov and Semyon Aranovich, the great man cannot be divided, as he often is in Western accounts, into the public artist who triumphed and the private genius who suffered. There is only one, enormously complicated Shostakovich, who is captured here in an array of photographs and woven into newsreels and propaganda films—a man both timid and bold, circumspect and hortatory, and always deeply hidden. As he ages, the small twist in his upper lip becomes more pronounced—a deepening scar. Though Stalin is never mentioned, the periodic denunciations of Shostakovich by composers and officials are read with deadpan irony over impassive photographs of these forgotten men. The film has the bitter humor and excruciating pathos of Shostakovich's greatest music.

—David Denby

Reeder's keenly intelligent performance. Ultimately—and to the benefit of the play—Doran is less interested in pushing a pet cause than in exploring the ambiguities of post-colonial responsibility. Carolyn Cantor ("Orange Flower Water") directs. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

MERCY ON THE DOORSTEP
The New York première of Gip Hoppe's dark comedy about hope and redemption. Jim Simpson directs. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

POINTS OF DEPARTURE
A young man emboldened by life in the United States (Alfredo Narciso) returns to his Central American birthplace to search for missing family members, only to find himself targeted by a regime intent on destroying the country's indigenous culture. He's aided by a young woman who works at his hotel—Petrona (Sandra Delgado), who sings in a clear voice what she cannot say. The play's second act follows Petrona in a succession of refugee camps with a young girl, Leti (Marisa Echeverría). Though his themes are admirable, Michael John Garcés's writing is clunky; his dialogue feels stilted and lifeless. Only the guitar playing of the composer-performer Cristian Amigo comes through naturally, conveying the emotion that's lacking elsewhere. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS GARLAND
Adrienne Barbeau stars as Judy Garland in Billy Van Zandt's play. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 212-239-6200.)

SARAH, PLAIN AND TALL
A musical based on the Newbery Medal-winning book by Patricia MacLachlan, about a woman who enters a family's lonely life on the prairie. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

SHILOH RULES
The New York première of a satire about Civil War reënactment, written by Doris Baizley and directed by Michaela Goldhaber. (Gene Frankel, 24 Bond St. 212-868-4444.)

33 TO NOTHING
A rock band struggles to stay together in Grant James Varjas's play, premièring at the Bottle Factory Theatre. (195 E. 3rd St. 212-868-4444.)

TRIAL BY WATER
Qui Nguyen's play about two Vietnamese brothers who escape their home country to seek a better life. (45 Below, 45 Bleecker St. 212-352-3101.)

TRILOGY
Three works based on Greek epics, "Iphigenia" (first seen in 2005), "Helen, Queen of Sparta" (2003), and "Odyssey: The Homecoming" (2004), are being staged in repertory by the ever-inventive Theodora Skipitares, who created, directed, and designed and whose homemade, hallucinatory works are an imagistic smorgasbord of puppetry techniques. Skipitares has ample help from her troupe of about a dozen human actors; from the composers Arnold Dreyblatt and Tim Schellenbaum and the percussionist Yukio Tsuji; and from scores of handmade, semi-animate creations, ranging from Indonesian shadow figures to a naked, nylon-bodied Helen of Troy who hatches from a giant egg. The Bunraku-style retelling of Euripides' "Iphigenia" is the most uncanny and intimate of the enjoyable triad. (LaMama E.T.C., 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Through April 2.)

Also Playing

ABIGAIL'S PARTY: Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **BACK OF THE THROAT:** Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. **BERNARDA ALBA:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **ENTERTAINING MR. SLOANE:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **FAMILY SECRETS:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100. **GREY GARDENS:** Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **THE LIEUTENANT OF INISHMORE:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200. **MEASURE FOR MEASURE:** Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. **THE MUSIC TEACHER:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **THE PAJAMA GAME:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **RED LIGHT WINTER:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **RING OF FIRE, THE JOHNNY CASH MUSICAL SHOW:** Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **SAKE WITH THE HAIKU GEISHA:** Perry Street Theatre, 31 Perry St. 212-868-4444. **SOLDIER'S WIFE:** Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231. Through April 2. **SWEENEY TODD:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 29: The funky R. & B. group the **Average White Band** comes from another place (Scotland) and another time (the early seventies). April 3-4: **Burt Bacharach,** the eternally dapper composer of "What the World Needs Now Is Love" and "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head." His latest album, "At This Time," is a departure for him. For the first time in his career, he wrote the lyrics to his songs, and he also collaborated with such unlikely artists as the hip-hop producer Dr. Dre. Like many Americans, Bacharach is obsessed with current events, and the album, which won him a Grammy, is a highly political affair. In concert, though, expect him to temper his outrage with the easy-listening songs that have brought so many couples together. He's backed by a full band and a string section.

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—March 30: **Cesaria Evora,** the Barefoot Diva, is touring with an opening act, **Seu Jorge,** who is not to be missed. The supercool Brazilian singer and actor provided comic relief in Wes Anderson's "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou" with his acoustic Portuguese renditions of David Bowie songs.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 30: **Deus,** a huge success in its native Belgium, traffics in impeccable adult rock with arena-size ambitions. March 31: Like many other bands these days, **Nine Black Alps** look to the past for inspiration. But this Manchester-based foursome stops about a decade earlier than many other acts. Instead of embracing danceable post-punk, the Alps revel in the heady choruses and rushing guitars of the grunge era. It's not particularly original, but it is quite catchy. And it's not hard to root for a group that takes its name from a Sylvia Plath poem and has already inspired a backlash in the blogosphere.

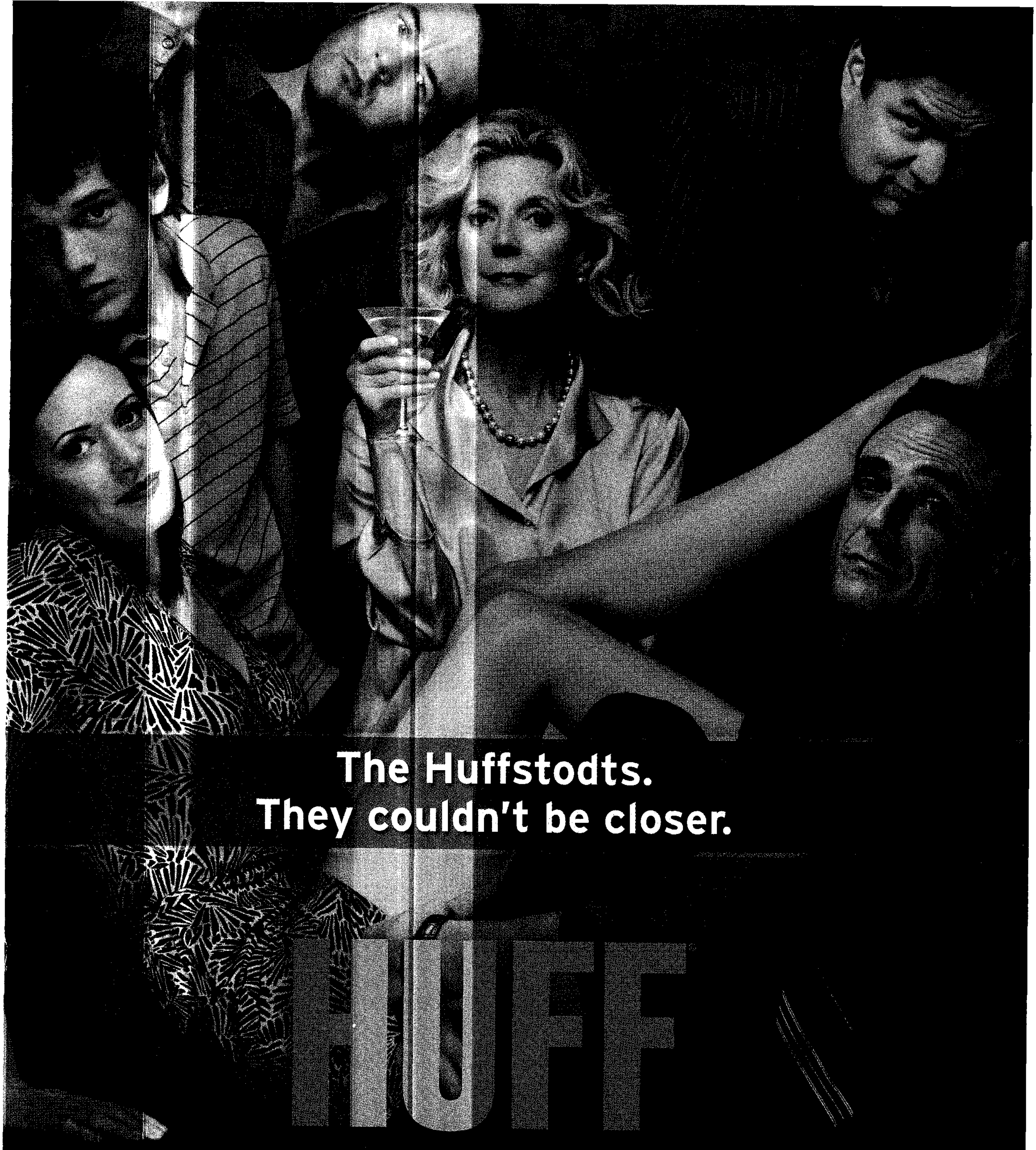
CANAL ROOM
285 West Broadway (212-941-8100)—April 5: The **Dirty Dozen Brass Band** are Crescent City revisionists who put the stomp into everything they play, from Jelly Roll Morton to Michael Jackson.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—April 1: The **Pretenders.** Chrissie Hynde, fresh from putting the final touches on a career-spanning boxed set, "Pirate Radio," is taking her band on a brief tour. April 4: The Los Angeles duo **She Wants Revenge** plays icy, dark tunes fit for New Wave weddings and wakes. Before this effort, the front man, Justin Warfield, used to rap with Prince Paul, and his cohort, Adam Bravin, was a club d.j. The two have a loyal Tinseltown following; they scored a deal with Fred Durst's label, Flawless, and Joaquin Phoenix directed the video to "Tear Us Apart," the creepy single that's popular on their local radio station KROQ.

"LET'S ZYDECO"
The roving concert series dedicated to the indigenous dance music of Louisiana presents a rare Saturday-night show. The **Bruce Daigrepont Cajun Band,** from New Orleans, performs on April 1 at Connolly's, an Irish pub in midtown with a fine wooden dance floor. (121 W. 45th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597 or visit www.letszydeco.com.)

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken, N.J. (201-653-1703)—March 31: The hard-rocking fivesome the **Rye Coalition** returns to its native state, following time in the studio with Dave Grohl and a tour of Europe supporting the Foo Fighters. Their forthcoming album, "Curses," comes with a bonus DVD of live footage.

LARA TOMLIN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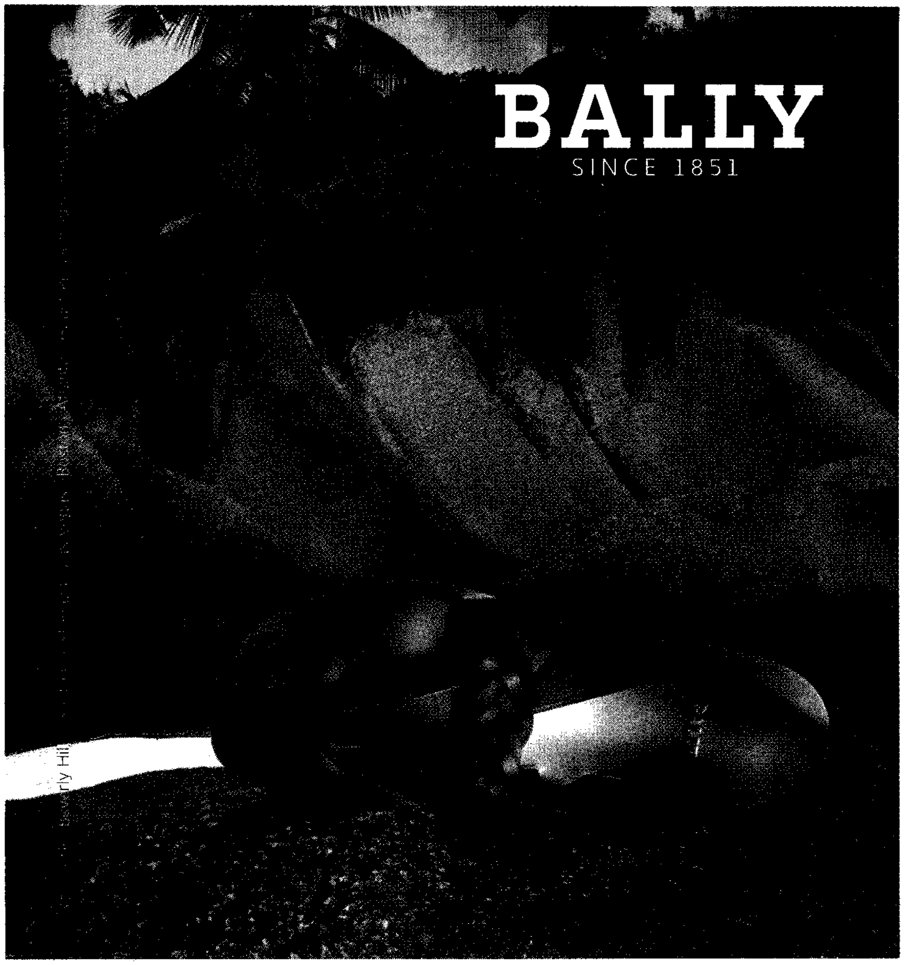

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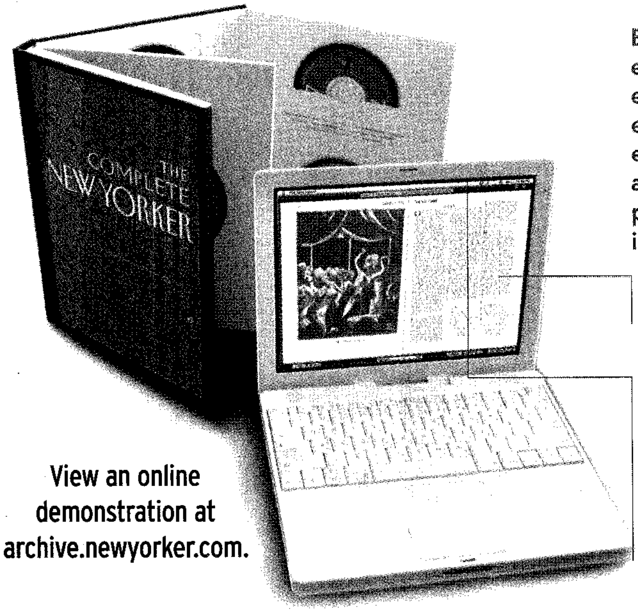

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MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—March 29: The short-lived British band **Th' Faith Healers.** March 30: **I Love You But I've Chosen Darkness** (see Northsix). April 1 and April 3: **Kieran Hebden,** known for his work with the British post-rock group Fridge as well as with the electronica project Four Tet, is a computer wizard from London. He is touring with **Steve Reid,** a veteran jazz drummer who has backed everyone from James Brown to Miles Davis. April 2: **Centro-Matic,** a band from Denton, Texas, is led by the prolific and tireless songwriter Will Johnson.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—March 31: Three years ago, **I Love You But I've Chosen Darkness,** known as I.L.Y.B.I.C.D. among fans, recorded a noted self-titled EP with their friend Britt Daniel, of their Austin cohorts Spoon, full of noirish yet poppy songs. Their much anticipated full-length recording, "Fear Is on Our Side," heads further into the shadows, to great effect.

PIANOS
158 Ludlow St. (212-505-3733)—March 31: The sweet indie pop of **Bishop Allen,** a local band that is releasing a new EP each month this year. April 1: The **Rye Coalition** (see Maxwell's) plays a matinée show. Later that night, **Koester,** the spacey, soulful ensemble led by Steve Koester, takes the stage with a show timed, coincidently, to provide relief to anyone who may need a shot of psychedelic salvation. (Flaming Lips fans shut out of their Webster Hall show, this means you.)

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—April 1: **They Shoot Horses, Don't They?** hails from Vancouver and could easily make you think there's something wonderful in the water up north. The eight-piece group, which recently released its début album, "Boo Hoo Hoo Boo," tosses together horns, keyboards, guitar, percussion, and off-the-wall lyrics into joyful exhortations to dance.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—March 29: The former Verve front man **Richard Ashcroft.** March 31-April 1: The **Flaming Lips.** Oklahoma's weirdest musical product returns. Expectations are high as Wayne Coyne and company unleash their latest creations from the band's new album, "At War with the Mystics." Unlike tickets for these shows, which vanished shortly after they went on sale, the album will soon be readily available; its release date is the Tuesday following this engagement.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
March 31: A night of folk music from Afghanistan featuring the singer **Vaheed Kaacemy** and the *rubab* (short-necked lute) player **Quraishi.** (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) April 1: The South Indian vocal music of **Sanjay Subramaniam.** (Symphony Space. For more information about both shows, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through May 13: The chanteuse **Karen Akers** focusses on the songwriting team of John Kander and Fred Ebb, the men who assured us that life is a cabaret.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Quick, name an Italian jazz musician. Candidates may come to mind more easily after the Umbria Festival. This run of double bills features the pianist **Dado Moroni** and the bassist **Giovanni Tommaso,** on March 28-29; the trumpeter **Enrico Rava** and the pianist **Enrico Pieranunzi,** on March 30-31; and the pianist **Stefano Bollani** and the saxophonist **Francesco Cafiso,** on April 1-2.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Starting April 4: The Café Carlyle is home to the signature sexy snarl, wicked sense of humor, and multilingual joie de vivre of **Eartha Kitt.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—March 28-April 2: The Brazilian husband-and-wife team of the percussionist **Airto Moreira** and the singer **Flora Purim** are still going strong, long after their seventies heyday. They are joined by the tenor saxophonist **Eric Alexander** for this engagement.

ISSUE PROJECT ROOM
400 Carroll St., Brooklyn (718-330-0313)—This converted silo alongside the Gowanus Canal is home to some of the most innovative collaborations on the scene. March 31 features the saxophonist **Ned Rothenberg** and the clarinettist **Marty Ehrlich,** performing solos and duos.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—The avant-jazz guitarist **James (Blood) Ulmer** has long been swayed by the blues, and in recent years he's embraced the form with the same intensity he brought to reinterpreting jazz guitar in the seventies. His weeklong retrospective begins, and ends, with solo blues performances. Ulmer, who also sings, in an earthy, endearing growl, has the stage to himself on March 28 and April 2. In between, on March 29-30, he presents Odyssey, his defining jazz trio, which first erupted onto the scene in 1983. It features the original members **Charles Burnham,** on violin, and **Warren Benbow,** on drums. That is followed on March 31 and April 1 by a return to the blues with the Memphis Blood band, which includes the guitarist **Vernon Reid.**

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—The new series "Harlem in the Himalayas" brings musicians picked by Loren Schoenberg, the executive director of the Jazz Museum in Harlem, to this repository of art from the world's highest mountain chain. March 31 features the multi-instrumentalist **Scott Robinson,** a chief soloist for Maria Schneider's band. If it has a reed attached to it, the virtuosic and passionate Robinson can swing it.

651 ARTS
The Brooklyn-based nonprofit presents **Jason Moran.** His last album, "Same Mother," focussed on the blues in its many permutations, but there's no telling where this nervy pianist is heading these days, which makes him endlessly fascinating. The open-minded rhythm team of the bassist **Tarus Mateen** and the drummer **Nasheet Waits** joins him here. (Kumble Theatre for the Performing Arts, Long Island University, 1 University Plaza, Brooklyn. 718-488-1624. March 31.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—March 28-April 2: Change has come to **Tom Harrell's** quintet: the tenor saxophonist Jimmy Greene, with whom the trumpeter had practically fused his own voice, has been replaced by the estimable **Wayne Escoffery.** The leader's lyricism and drive remain a given. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ZANKEL HALL
Carnegie Hall, 57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—March 28-30: The **SFJAZZ Collective,** a compact repertory ensemble led by the saxophonist **Joshua Redman** and featuring both newer players (**Nicholas Payton, Renee Rosnes**) and more experienced ones (**Bobby Hutcherson**), salutes three major figures over three nights. The work of Ornette Coleman is featured first, John Coltrane's legacy is covered the following night, and the closing night is devoted to Herbie Hancock's material.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Robert Rauschenberg: Combines."** A majestic, exhilarating show of painting-sculpture hybrids dating from the fifties and early sixties. Through April 2. ♦ **"Samuel Palmer (1805-1881): Vision and Landscape."** A major retrospective, co-organized with the British Museum, reviews the work of the Romantic-era landscape painter. Through May 29. ♦ **"Kara Walker at the Met: After the Deluge."** In the wake of Katrina, the artist known for her politically charged silhouette cutouts contemplates the effects of watery disasters on African-American communities, through a collection of her own work and items selected from the permanent collection. Through July 30. ♦ **"A Taste for Opulence: Sèvres Porcelain from the Collection."** Tang-dynasty craftsmen developed porcelain, but it was not until nearly a thousand years later, in 1740, that French designers mastered the precise mixture of kaolin and feldspathic clay and opened the Sèvres

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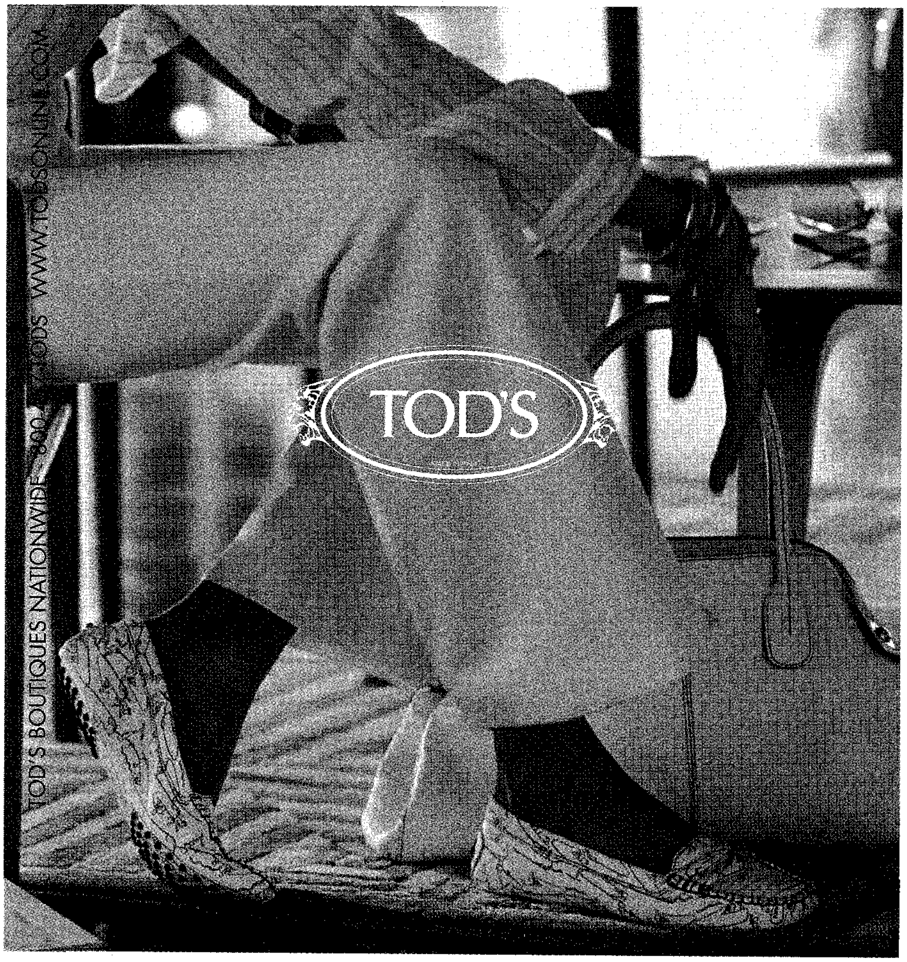
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factory. Thereafter, Sèvres became the byword in French elegance, and a choice array, culled from the Met's extensive collection, shows why. Consider the Prince de Rohan's dessert service, glowing with the intense near-turquoise known as *bleu céleste* and edged in gilt. Or the famous double-elephant-headed vases, a conceit of chinoiserie, or the writing desks and sideboards inlaid with painted porcelain panels bedecked by putti, fruit, and riots of flowers. Through Aug. 13. ♦ **"Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh."** Opens March 28. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Edvard Munch: The Modern Life of the Soul"** is the first American museum retrospective of the Norwegian artist (1863-1944) in thirty years. Through May 8. ♦ In **"Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking,"** artists from Islamic backgrounds examine their cultures and homelands, mostly from afar. Unexpectedly, perhaps, women reign. Included are works by Mona Hatoum, Shirin Neshat, Ghada Amer, Shahzia Sikander, Shirazeh Houshiary, Emily Jacir, and Marjane Satrapi. Through May 22. ♦ The retrospective **"John Szarkowski: Photographs."** Through May 15. ♦ **"On-Site: New Architecture in Spain."** Through May 1. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"David Smith: A Centennial."** Smith (1906-65) parlayed his experiences as a welder, an employee of the Studebaker company, a painter, and an acolyte of the Cubist movement into tremendous steel sculptures that were championed by Clement Greenberg and have become emblems of American modernism. Through May 14. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Day for Night,"** the 2006 Biennial, curated by Philippe Vergne and Chrissie Iles. More than a hundred artists are represented. Through May 28. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"William Wegman: Funney/Strange."** This major retrospective goes beyond clever, anthropomorphic photographs of Weimaraners (though those are here, too) with forty years of the artist's paintings, drawings, videos, and films. Through May 28. ♦ **"Symphonic Poem: The Art of Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Darwin"** traces the discoveries and influence of the great naturalist (1809-82) with, among other things, a re-creation of his study, samples of fossils he collected, and live specimens of tortoises, frogs, and iguanas like those that he encountered in the Galápagos Islands. Through Aug. 20. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter"** is back for the eighth year. Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—Photographs accompanying **"A Passion for Asia: The Rockefeller Family Collects"** show various Rockefeller manses tricked out with Asian booty, and the images register as alarmingly Orientalist at first glance. Then, though, there are the objects themselves—near-priceless metalwork, statuary, textiles, ceramics, manuscripts, screens, scrolls, and costumes—which are tastefully installed in dimly lit, creamily colored galleries that accentuate their beauty, craft, and opulence. Chinese and Japanese vessels, Persian and Indian manuscripts—even a Noguchi sculpture—vie for attention on one floor, while religious works, from Chinese, Nepalese, and Indian bodhisattvas and gods to a simple wooden cross by the American modernist George Nakashima, occupy another. Ultimately, the quality of this collection demonstrates the Rockefellers' passion for, and commitment to, Asian art, which drove them to found this institution, in 1956. Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—The Spring "Selections" show turns the Drawing Room project space into a screening room for **"Analog Animations."** Through April 15. ♦ **"Joëlle Tuerlinckx: Drawing Inventory."** Through April 22. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Goya's Last Works."** Through May 14. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5. The galleries for the Goya exhibition will stay open until 8 on Friday evenings for the duration of the show.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Klee and America."** Through May 22. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—Jessica Stockholder's installation **"Of Standing Float Roots in Thin Air."** Through May 1. ♦ **"Jessica Rankin: The Measure of Every Pause."** Through May 1. ♦ **"Wolfgang Tillmans: Freedom from the Known."** Through May 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

SCULPTURE CENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—Anya Gallaccio's **"One Art"** borrows Elizabeth Bishop's title for a meditation on themes of decay and reclamation. A huge dead tree, cut into pieces and bolted back together, fills the Sculpture Center's soaring industrial space, so that its branches graze the iron beams and clerestory windows fifty feet above the ground. Held up by guy wires and brutally scaffolded by metal struts, it projects a monstrous, captive grace. Through April 3. ♦ The latest iteration of the **"In Practice Projects"** series presents the work of eight young artists grappling with the venue's catacomb-ish basement and high-walled, gravel-strewn courtyard. Standouts are Mary Temple's barely there wall work—what appears to be a leafy shadow cast against a subterranean wall is in fact painted on—and Monika Zarzeczna's cell-like installation of a desk, a lamp, and a litter of small, awkwardly posed portraits. Through April 3. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES–UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

KEIZO KITAJIMA
These gritty, aggressive photographs, which Kitajima took in New York in the early nineteen-eighties and are only now being exhibited here, will inevitably be compared to the work of his brilliant teacher, Daido Moriyama, as well as to the work of other, earlier denizens of these mean streets. But whether he's shooting in Harlem, on Christopher Street, or at the Mudd Club (isn't that Madonna?), Kitajima holds his own. His strongest pictures, all in the inkiest black-and-white, have the sweaty immediacy and uncomfortable intimacy of paparazzi shots—stolen moments in a city that was even more on edge than usual. Through April 1. (Cohen Amador, 41 E. 57th St. 212-759-6740.)

"RARE SPECIMEN"
From 1869 to 1877, before it moved into its home on Central Park West, the American Museum of Natural History displayed its specimens in the Arsenal, in Central Park. Those galleries are again turned to meditations on the natural world with this surprisingly witty group show, featuring work by Karin Weiner, Alexis Rockman, Wes Lang, and several other artists. Emilie Clark's dreamy, vaguely botanical watercolors provide a cozy counterpoint to Jeff Hoppa's white-grounded pencil drawings of skulls and skeletons; Mark Dion sketches a birder's kit, complete with guidebooks and a folding stool; Walton Ford's three-toed kingfisher clasps a fishing lure in its beak. Through April 12. (The Arsenal Gallery, in Central Park, entrance at 64th St. and Fifth Ave. For more information, call 311.)

"STILL LIFE"
In his best shows—and this is one of them—the gallerist Keith de Lellis mixes artists with major and minor reputations in order to shed fresh light on both. His superb survey of twentieth-century still-life photographs puts Irving Penn, Edward Weston, Alexander Rodchenko, and Margaret Bourke-

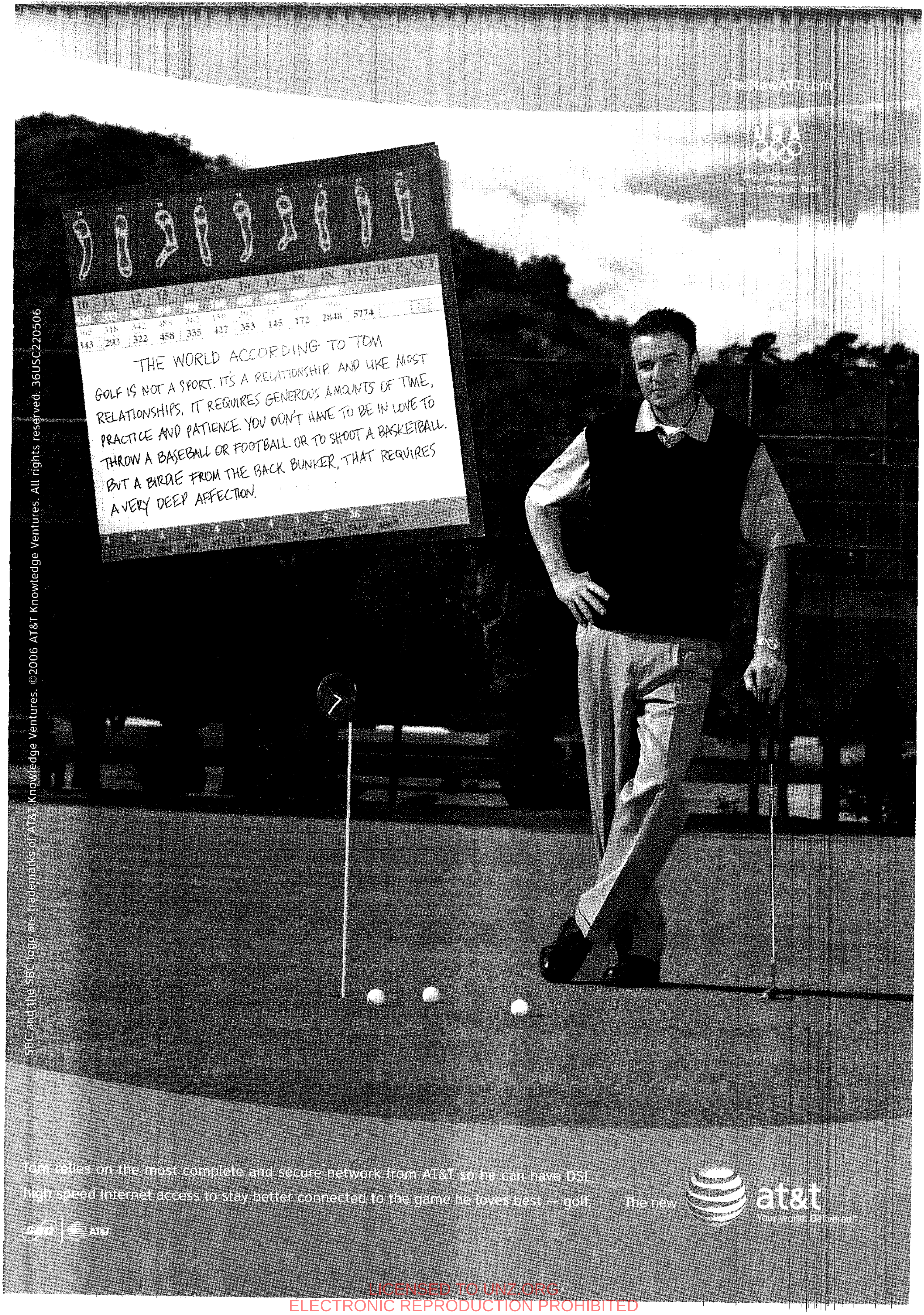
TABLES FOR TWO
NOODLE PUDDING

38 Henry St., Brooklyn (718-625-3737)—If you set out to create the epitome of a decent neighborhood restaurant, you'd probably arrive at something a lot like Noodle Pudding. The room would be informal—exposed brick, perhaps an old stove against a wall, slightly eccentric light fixtures. There would be locals drinking at the bar and large round tables with families noisily celebrating birthdays. On busy nights there would be a pleasing atmosphere of barely controlled chaos, as a friendly staff made sure there were enough menus—indeed, chairs—to go round.

Noodle Pudding's quietly excellent Italian cooking avoids both the attention-seeking chic of modern Italian cuisine (no fennel pollen here) and the caloric suicide of "Sopranos"-style fare. The menu is large, with some twenty daily specials supplementing a similar number of permanent dishes. There is usually some kind of homemade black squid-ink pasta with seafood—spaghetti with scorpion fish, say, or fettucine with octopus, calamari, and mussels—and it always tastes as if it were made about five minutes before. Lasagna works the same way: the recipes vary daily (wild boar; mushroom and leek; squash and pork sausage), and the result is always hearty and never overwhelming. The usual meats appear—osso buco, short rib, pork chop—along with an outstanding, velvety calf's liver *alla veneziana*, while salty potatoes and leeks upstage the perfectly decent half chicken they garnish. Occasionally the inspiration falters: there are a few dishes, like the gnocchi and the rabbit, that feel as though someone just threw a lot of tomato or garlic at them and hoped for the best.

It's important to leave room for dessert here. All Italian restaurants have tiramisu, but rarely does it achieve quite this feathery delicacy. Best of all is the lemon-goat-cheese cake, an ingenious exercise in texture that manages to be simultaneously creamy and breadlike. Noodle Pudding doesn't have noodle pudding, however, nor does its name have anything to do with the familiar Jewish kugel. The restaurant's owner, Antonio Migliaccio, is from Ischia, an island near Naples, where *migliaccio* is a sweet dish, traditionally consumed at Carnival, made with pasta, eggs, and orange peel. Pity he doesn't serve it. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner. Entrées $8.95-$24.)

—Leo Carey



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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

White in the same room with Edward Quigley, Gordon Coster, Paul Woolf, and Harold Haliday Costain, and everyone shines a little brighter. Even if Man Ray's eccentric arrangement of butterflies (one of only two color photos in the show) and Edward Steichen's dramatic composition of moth wings and wood grain steal the show, work like Bernard Shea Horne's early modernist studies of ceramic forms is still deserving of the shared stage. Through April 15. (De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 212-327-1482.)

Short List

PETER BEGLEY: Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 212-879-6606. Through April 22. **DAVID HAMMONS:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through April 1. **SALLY MANN:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave. 212-744-2313. Through April 22. **FRANCIS PICABIA:** Michael Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through April 15. **TOM WESSELMANN:** L & M, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through April 15.

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

TRACEY MOFFATT
Love, as depicted in classic Hollywood movies and edited by Moffatt into a rapid-cut twenty-minute video, follows a predictable pattern. Effusive professions of affection are followed by desperate groping, kissing, and hot sex. Things quickly turn sour. Accusations, slaps, drinks thrown in faces, name-calling, and recantations degenerate into battering and crimes of passion. The repetition of motifs produces high-camp hilarity, but Moffatt's montage feels strikingly similar to videos by Christian Marclay, Jonathan Horowitz, and Candice Breitz. The "Adventure Series" photographs, re-creating movie posters, pulp-fiction covers, and comics, similarly send up hackneyed stereotypes, but they are less turbocharged and less successful. Through April 29. (Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978.)

JOHN PILSON
Communal play, with its brutalities and in-group/out-group codes, is the subject of the four videos in Pilson's "Coliseum." A trio of sports fanatics share a conference call, obsessively discussing favorite teams and players, while in another piece, a group of forty-something guys, former Dungeons and Dragons fanatics, revisit their old roles. These comparatively passive male rituals are juxtaposed with significantly more active modes for women: a carefully choreographed multi-person sparring exercise unfolds in an aikido studio, and a group of young British actresses rehearse a monologue from Mamet's über-masculine, quintessentially American drama "Glengarry Glen Ross." Through April 1. (Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335.)

CHRISTOPH RUCKHÄBERLE
Ruckhäberle's paintings are modern primitives in faux-folk-art mode. Sharply angled floors, walls, and tabletops are painted in competing stripes and checkerboards, with scratches and drips disrupting the patterns but not relieving their seasick intensity. The characters, with their hook noses and kneesocks, might have been borrowed from a Picassoid commedia dell'arte, and ring with contemporary grunge-glam fashion. Through April 8. (Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700.)

"THE TRACE OF A TRACE OF A TRACE"
In this group show, landscapes and people appear through the paint darkly, or in a blur. Gerhard Richter's little black-and-white canvas depicts a baby lying on a table, but it looks at first glance like a mere swipe of the palette knife; Enoc Perez pictures a modern villa in Capri as a toy house drowning in a sea of slathered color. Not all the images are gestural; Jack Goldstein's night sky pierced with klieg lights is sharp and graphic, as are the red leaf shapes silhouetted against white in Daan van Golden's work. But the sense of heavy, even portentous, investment in painterliness remains. The show's title is misleading—it's more like "Stain of a Place." With Michael Raedecker, Mary Weatherford, and Vija Celmins, among others. Through April 15. (Rubenstein, 527 W. 23rd St. 212-627-8000.)

"TURN THE BEAT AROUND" / KARA WALKER
Seven young painters and sculptors, including Chris Dorland, Ryan Johnson, and Paula Wilson, are gathered in a group show emphasizing harsh, high-spirited abstraction, punctuated by recognizable objects—a shopping cart, a football helmet—treated in the same style. A small, gorgeous show by Kara Walker shares the bill. All Walker's tropes appear—the grotesque rapes and lynchings, the scatological kitsch—but her virtuosic formal experiments keep shifting the emotional tone. A set of pencil drawings almost (but not quite) dispense with caricature, while a suite of collages mix colored-paper cutouts with found materials. The most significant innovation is a haunting, parodic film that melds shadow puppets, drawing, live action, and voice-over with a soundtrack of mournful nineteenth-century ballads. Through April 1. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

Short List

JENNIFER AND KEVIN MCCOY: Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323. Through April 8. **RACHEL WHITEREAD:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through April 1.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

"THE DOG SHOW: YEAR OF THE DOG"
The small East Village space Mascot Studio hosts its seventh annual celebration of the canine in art. The

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roster of artists, most of them local, includes Peter McCaffrey, Luba Jane Blatman, Anne Watkins, and Chris Buzelli. Through April 15. (328 E. 9th St. 212-228-9090.)

"NEO SINCERITY: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE COMIC AND THE COSMIC IS A SINGLE LETTER"
This show's curator, Amei Wallach, cites Aristophanes, Kant, and Freud as thinkers who employed humor to cope in dire times. (In return for safe passage out of Nazi-occupied Austria, Freud wrote, "To Whom It May Concern, I can heartily recommend the Gestapo to anyone. Sigmund Freud.") More than twenty artists here thumb their noses at war, poverty, and racism. Among them, Art Spiegelman's recent comics address 9/11 and his horror at the U.S. response, Olav Westphalen skirts German laws banning the swastika by attempting to ride a bike with swastika-shaped wheels, and Paul Chan studies the facial hair of famous radicals with a video titled "Now Let Us Praise American Leftists." Through April 8. (Apexart, 291 Church St. 212-431-5270.)

Short List

TONY OURSLER: Nyehaus, 15 Gramercy Park S. 212-995-1785. Through April 29. **"THE DOWNTOWN SHOW: THE NEW YORK ART SCENE, 1974–1984":** Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780. Through April 1.

DANCE

TERO SAARINEN
The Finnish dancer and choreographer, whose company débuts at the Joyce this week, has made dances for the Lyon Opéra Ballet and Batsheva Dance Company but is little known in the U.S. He also studied Nepalese and Japanese traditional dance and the postwar form Butoh, and his expressionistic compositions reflect these influences—with precise, fluid steps, crouches, lunges, contorted postures, and slow, repetitive arm movements. In his best-known work, "Hunt" (set to Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring"), Saarinen battles an unseen predator, rocking on his knees, twisting his upper body and carving the air with taut, curved arms, even evoking Fokine's famous "Dying Swan" solo, until projected images overtake his body, turning him into a mysterious, disembodied figure. (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. March 28-April 1 at 8 and April 2 at 2 and 7:30.)

WORK & SHOW FESTIVAL
The annual festival, which débuts the products of a yearlong residency, continues with work by Christal Brown and a shared evening by Christine Suarez and Katie Workum. Brown, a member of Urban Bush Women, offers "Distinctly Akin," an exuberant study in cross-cultural female bonding. In the clever "A Question of Faith," Suarez and her endearing company wrestle with each other and with the multiple connotations of the title, from belief in God to the trust between audience and performer. Workum's "Red" is an odd and amusing fable of familial dysfunction, crossing Little Red Riding Hood with Cain and Abel and culminating in a seventies-style game show that asks the question: Which child do you love more? With a live score performed by the experimental band Edison Woods. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. March 29-April 1 at 7. Through April 8.)

TERE O'CONNOR DANCE
Tere O'Connor's "Baby," a new evening-length quintet, concludes its run at Dance Theatre Workshop. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 29-April 1 at 7:30.)

SAEKO ICHINOHE DANCE COMPANY
The venerable multiethnic troupe offers two premières. With "Chuya Nakahara: Poignant Poems," Ichinohe pays tribute to Nakahara, the Rimbaud of Japan, bringing to life his visions of a world overrun by spirits of the dead. In Jeff Moen's "Shadows Pierce My Soul," three spirits, each representing a different Japanese era, meet and recognize their kinship. Also on the program are Ichinohe's radiant "Pearl" and the choreographer's own performance of "Willow Tree." (Ailey Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-757-2531. April 1 at 3:30 and 7:30.)

MANDING JATA
The seven members of this troupe hail from Mali, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Ghana, all countries influenced by the Mande and once part of the empire of Mali—one of the earliest and richest cultures in western Africa—which reached its apogee in the fourteenth century. In a constant shifting of styles, the high-energy performers sing, dance, and play traditional instruments, from the ethereal kora to the stirring *djembe* drum. (Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, at Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. April 1 at 8.)

CONFIGURATION
The tasteful, competent chamber-ballet troupe from Cape Cod returns to Symphony Space, continuing its mission of presenting the work of contemporary choreographers. Harrison McEldowney, in "Dance Sport," offers a satirical view of dance as an athletic event. Michael Shannon crosses Flaubert and Rachmaninoff with his "Madame Bovary Pas de Deux." And in "Before All Worlds" Joseph Cipolla takes on the music of Radiohead, both in the form of the band's recordings and in classical renditions by the pianist Christopher O'Riley. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 3 at 8.)

JAMES SEWELL BALLET
The Minneapolis-based company makes a welcome return to the Joyce, bringing more of Sewell's mar-

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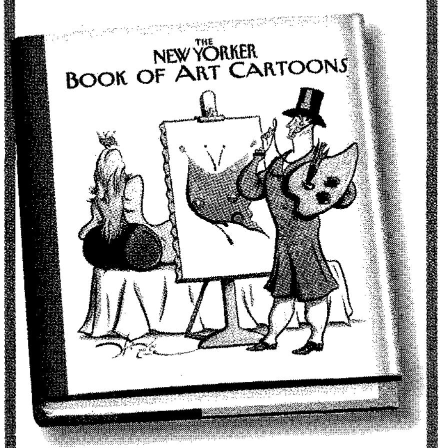
High art and high jinks



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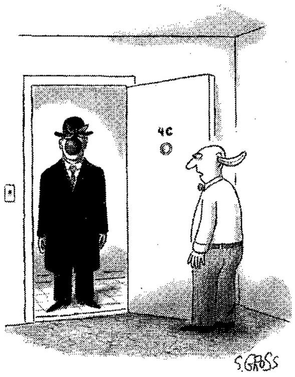

"Oh, it's you."

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vellously inventive choreography. With its Schubert score, improvised sections, and entrances from the auditorium, "Anagram" has a communal, dances-at-a-gathering feel. In "Involution," the isolated dancers give their spiritual deformity outward form and, in the process, take on a yogic grace. "Guy Noir: The Ballet" brings Garrison Keillor's radio private eye to the stage, with a voice-over by Keillor and a groan-worthy script by Keillor and Sewell that hinges on punning "tulle" and "tool." (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. April 4 at 8. Through April 9.)

"SPIRIT OF THE DANCE"
David King's touring dance extravaganza (not to be confused with Michael Flatley's "Lord of the Dance") takes a simple formula—multitudes of young tireless dancers, in flashy costumes, doing Irish step dancing in thunderous unison to deafeningly loud music—and adds salsa, tango, flamenco, Scottish Highland fling, and even a bit of cancan. The jumble of styles and reliance on effects—scores of arms twisting, feet stomping, or legs kicking all at once—is echoed by the Euro-world-pop score, which was composed by King. (Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, Lehman College, the Bronx. 718-960-8833. April 4 at 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

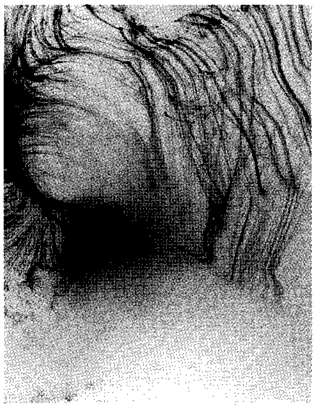
METROPOLITAN OPERA
March 29 at 8: Verdi's **"Luisa Miller,"** with Wendy White, Eduardo Villa, Carlos Alvarez, James Morris, and Phillip Ens; Maurizio Benini conducts. ♦ April 1 at 8: The final performance, with Irina Mishura, Neil Shicoff, and Vitalij Kowaljow replacing White, Villa, and Morris. ♦ March 30 at 7:30: Intense performances from an indomitable collection of Slavic singers—not to mention the enduring strengths of the score—win out over garish sets and costumes in the Met's première production of Tchaikovsky's **"Mazeppa,"** featuring Olga Guryakova, Larissa Diadkova, Oleg Balashov, Nikolai Putilin, and Paata Burchuladze; Valery Gergiev. (This is the final performance.) ♦ March 31 at 8 and April 3 at 7:30: **"Don Pasquale,"** Donizetti's extraordinarily deft and charming "comic drama," not heard at the Met for a quarter century, returns with a new production (by Otto Schenk) and major star power: Anna Netrebko and Juan Diego Flórez as the pair of scheming young lovers, Mariusz Kwiecien as the cunning, helpful doctor, and Simone Alaimo as the Don, their bumbling mark. Maurizio Benini conducts. ♦ April 1 at 1:30: Whenever the soprano Karita Mattila returns to the Met, it is an occasion. She shines in the title role of **"Fidelio,"** Beethoven's happy symphony of freedom and justice, though the revival of Jürgen Flimm's production, set in a twentieth-century fascist state, is sapped by an audibly unhappy orchestra (under an ineffective Paul Nadler, replacing James Levine). Mattila's impressive colleagues include Jennifer Welch-Babidge, Ben Heppner (as Florestan), Gregory Turay, Alan Held, Kristinn Sigmundsson, and James Morris. ♦ April 4 at 8: With Richard Margison, a reliably heroic tenor, replacing Heppner. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
March 30 at 7:30 and April 1 at 8: **"Don Giovanni,"** with Orla Boylan, Elizabeth Caballero, Yeghishe Manucharyan, Christopher Schaldenbrand, and Robert Gierlach in the leading roles; Steven Mosteller conducts. ♦ March 31 at 8 and April 2 at 1:30: The composer Mark Adamo, who scored a hit at City Opera with his version of "Little Women," returns with **"Lysistrata, or the Nude Goddess,"** a melodically winning wartime comedy freely adapted from the play by Aristophanes. With Emily Pulley, Myrna Paris, Jennifer Rivera, and Chad Shelton; George Manahan. ♦ April 1 at 1:30: James Robinson's staging of **"La Bohème,"** set in Paris during the First World War, provides a resonant frame for a crew of talented young singing actors. This revival features Kelly Kaduce, Shannah Timms, Gerard Powers, and Grant Youngblood; Steven White. (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ABSTRACT THINKING

Wolfgang Tillmans, the German-born, London-based photographer, has never tied himself down to the literal image. Although he made his reputation in the early nineties for sly insider's views of youth culture, Tillmans has also turned out landscapes, portraits, and a series of charged still-lifes that seem to be only loosely anchored in the material world. Recently he has experimented with pure abstraction, and massive nonrepresentational photos are at the core of "Freedom from the Known," his sprawling new show at P.S. 1. Putting his camera aside, Tillmans manipulates light and chemicals applied directly to photographic paper. His bruised monochromes, agitated color fields, and scratched-up swaths of foam recall psychedelic light-show effects, but they're more mysterious. Juxtaposing these almost empty images with photographs of a vase of peonies, pyramids, open windows, a crouching soldier, and a man's scrotum, Tillmans invites us to see all these things as potential abstractions—buoyant, atomized, melting into air.

—*Vince Aletti*



WOLFGANG TILLMANS, "IT'S ONLY LOVE GIVE IT AWAY" (2005)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
With Passover and Holy Week approaching, New York's ensembles turn their attention to eternal concerns. The Philharmonic's contribution comes courtesy of Lorin Maazel, who will bring his mastery of tone and detail to Verdi's Requiem; Fiorenza Cedolins, Luciana D'Intino, Ramón Vargas, and Orlin Anastassov are the vocal soloists, with the New York Choral Artists assisting. (March 29-30 and April 4 at 7:30 and April 1 at 8.) ♦ Kodály's colorful "Dances of Galánta" is a bridge between Brahms's "Haydn Variations" and Dvořák's Seventh Symphony (an homage to Brahms, his patron and friend); Maazel conducts. (March 31 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

SAINT LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
March 31 at 7:30: David Robertson, the conductor of the bright and limber Midwestern orchestra, begins a weekend residency by offering the New York première of "Cassandre," a work by the Swiss composer Michael Jarrell based on Christa Wolf's novel about the fall of Troy; the actress Barbara Sukowa ("Berlin Alexanderplatz") is the narrator. (Zankel Hall.) ♦ April 1 at 8: Robertson turns his attention to two great works of mourning, John Adams's "On the Transmigration of Souls" and Brahms's "German Requiem" (with the soprano Camilla Tilling, the baritone Russell Braun, and the St. Louis Symphony Chorus). (Carnegie Hall.) (212-247-7800.)

BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC
Michael Christie, the group's young new music director, leads a program centered on Mozart (the young master's incidental music for "Thamos, King of Egypt" and Schnittke's parody "Moz-Art à la Haydn") and Shostakovich (a transcription of the Eighth Quartet), this season's birthday boys. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. April 1 at 8.)

CHOIR OF TRINITY CHURCH
Robert Levin's completion of Mozart's Mass in C Minor—a piece of contemporary music, really—has its first-ever performance on historical instruments, courtesy of the Rebel Baroque Orchestra, who perform it along with Owen Burdick's excellent choir. (Broadway at Wall St. April 2 at 3. Tickets at the door.)

SAINT THOMAS CHOIR:
THE ST. JOHN PASSION
New York's renowned Anglican choir of men and boys, under the direction of John Scott, offers a performance of Bach's Easter masterwork, with the musicians of Concert Royal assisting. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. 212-664-9360. April 4 at 7:30.)

RECITALS

JAIME LAREDO AND LEON FLEISHER
The eminent violinist and pianist, two artists who know their way around Brahms, perform all three of the Sonatas for Violin and Piano. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 29 at 8.)

"INTERPRETATIONS" SERIES:
BRIAN SCHOBER / STEVE SWELL
Two composers, stretching the divide between the traditional and the avant-garde, share the World Music Institute's latest program, in which Stephen Gosling performs Schober's piano suite "Manhattan Impromptus" and Swell, a trombonist, offers "Being Here—America Is Not an Abstract Concept" with his ensemble and the baritone Thomas Buckner. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. March 30 at 8.)

THE KITCHEN: THE CLOGS
The young American-Australian instrumental ensemble—falling stylistically somewhere between Satie and Miles Davis—brings its act to the downtown performance space. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. March 31 and April 1 at 8.)

ST. LUKE'S CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
"Crosstown New York," an eclectic program of works by Chester Biscardi, Martha Mooke, Greg Sandow, and Joan Tower, offered in a relaxed gallery setting. (Chelsea Art Museum, Eleventh Ave. at 22nd St. 212-594-6100. April 1 at 2.)

THE TALLIS SCHOLARS: "MOZART'S ROOTS"
Even Mozart didn't come from nowhere, as the exquisite British choral ensemble, favorites of the Miller Theatre series, demonstrates by offering a sampling of Renaissance and Baroque polyphony by Hassler, Senfl, Schütz, and Bach. (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. 212-854-7799. April 1 at 3.)

ALICE COOTE
The young mezzo-soprano, in town for her Met début, offers a recital of songs by Schubert and Mahler ("Songs of a Wayfarer," usually sung by a baritone) with the estimable pianist Julius Drake. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. April 2 at 2.)

VADIM REPIN AND NIKOLAI LUGANSKY
Two energetic and admired young artists perform music for violin and piano by Bartók, Schubert, Pärt ("Fratres"), and Franck. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. April 2 at 3.)

"MILTON BABBITT AT 90"
The master serialist's "Arie da Capo" and "Three Compositions for Piano" lie at the heart of a program offered by the Washington Square Contemporary Music Society, which also includes works by some of his esteemed colleagues (including Louis Karchin and Martin Boykan). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. April 3 at 8.)

YUNDI LI
The fiery yet thoughtful young pianist, replacing an ailing Murray Perahia, performs works by Mozart, Schumann ("Carnaval"), and Liszt (the Sonata in B Minor) at Carnegie Hall. (212-247-7800. April 3 at 8.)

CASSATT QUARTET
The group, which brings a smart and elegant touch to music new and old, celebrates its twentieth anniversary with the pianist Peter Basquin, performing world-première piano quintets by Daniel S. Godfrey and Shafer Mahoney (along with Dohnányi's popular Piano Quintet in C Minor). (Lang Recital Hall, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 69th St. 212-772-4448. April 4 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

ADAM & STEVE
In this comedy, a gay man in New York reconnects with a man (Malcolm Gets) he had dated in the nineteen-eighties. Directed by Craig Chester, who also stars. Opening March 31. (Chelsea Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

ATL
A comic drama about teens in Atlanta who meet up at a hip-hop roller rink. Directed by Chris Robinson, based on a story by Antwone Fisher. Opening March 31. (In wide release.)

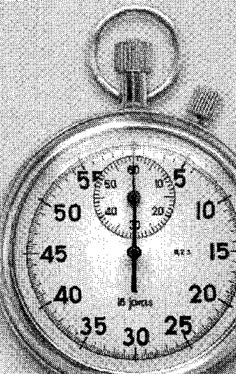
AWESOME; I FUCKIN' SHOT THAT!
A Beastie Boys concert at Madison Square Garden, videotaped mainly by spectators to whom the band gave cameras. Opening March 31. (Union Square.)

BASIC INSTINCT 2
Michael Caton-Jones directed this sequel, in which Sharon Stone once again plays a novelist, who this time ensnares a psychiatrist (David Morrissey). Opening March 31. (In wide release.)

BRICK
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 31. (Angelika Film Center.)

THE DEVIL AND DANIEL JOHNSTON
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 31. (Sunshine Cinema.)

DRAWING RESTRAINT 9
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 29. (IFC Center.)



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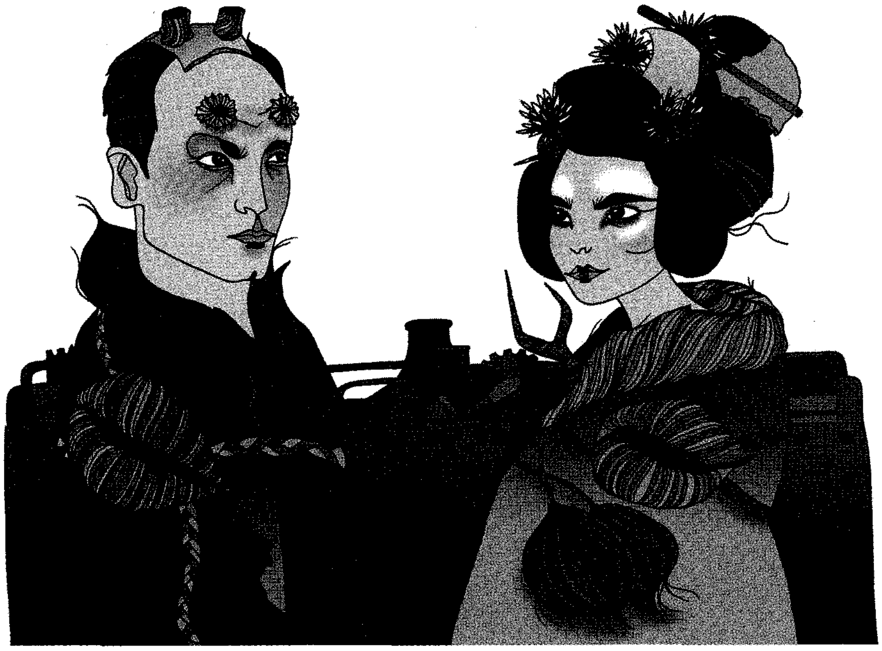
Bodhisattva; China; Tang (618–907), first half of the 8th century; Collection of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Nelson A. Rockefeller bequest, Kykuit. Photo: John Bigelow Taylor

ICE AGE: THE MELTDOWN
A sequel to the computer-animated children's film, directed by Carlos Saldanha. Opening March 31. (In wide release.)

IOWA
Matt Farnsworth directed and stars in this drama about the effects of crystal meth on a small Midwestern town. Opening March 31. (Village East Cinemas.)

IRON ISLAND
A drama from Iran, directed by Mohammad Rasoulof, about a group of people who live in a decommissioned oil tanker. In Farsi. Opening March 31. (Cinema Village.)



Matthew Barney and Björk star in "Drawing Restraint 9," opening March 29.

LISELOTTE WATKINS

MARILYN HOTCHKISS' BALLROOM DANCING AND CHARM SCHOOL
Robert Carlyle, Marisa Tomei, Mary Steenburgen, and Donnie Wahlberg star in this romantic drama, about a widower's quest to help a stranger find a lost love. Directed by Randall Miller. Opening March 31. (First & 62nd Cinemas and Union Square.)

SLITHER
A horror film about an organism from outer space that wants to consume all life on earth. Directed by James Gunn. Opening March 31. (In wide release.)

YANG BAN XI: THE 8 MODEL WORKS
Yan Ting Yuen directed this documentary, about Maoist-era operas that have regained popularity in China. In Mandarin. Opening March 29. (Film Forum.)

NOW PLAYING

THE DEVIL AND DANIEL JOHNSTON
This fascinating documentary, directed by Jeff Feuerzeig, about one of indie rock's most troubled cult figures, is a thoroughly engrossing look at music and madness. While growing up in a conservative Christian community in Virginia, Daniel Johnston displayed a gift for art, filmmaking, and music, which his fundamentalist family found hard to understand and actively discouraged. He was also an undiagnosed manic-depressive, prone to fits of violence and anger, who caused great harm to those around him. After years of adolescent problems and inertia, he ran off to Austin, Texas, where his songs—simple tunes that have a yearning, childlike emotional quality—gradually made him a local hero. He then began to pursue erratically his quest for stardom. Feuerzeig artfully mines Johnston's hundreds of cassettes and homemade Super-8 movies to create an eccentric, obsessive portrait of an artist fighting his hallucinatory demons. The result is as nakedly emotional as it is startling.—*Bruce Diones* (Sunshine Cinema.)

DON'T COME KNOCKING
This bittersweet Western blues, directed by Wim Wenders from a script by Sam Shepard, is a minor-key delight. Shepard plays Howard Spence, an aging star of Western films and a legendary tabloid troublemaker who wants out: he sneaks off the set and finds his mother (Eva Marie Saint, in a performance of remarkably high relief), whom he hasn't seen in more than thirty years. She lets slip a word about his son, whom he has never met, and he heads for Butte, Montana, to look for him. What Spence finds there requires some suspension of disbelief—not just his son, Earl (Gabriel Mann), and Earl's mother (Jessica Lange) but also a daughter, Sky (the gossamer Sarah Polley), whom he had with another woman; it's as if no one in Butte around 1980 had ever heard of a paternity suit. The faith in the implausible is rewarded. Shepard's sharp writing memorably delineates the quartet's quirky struggles to connect, and though Wenders, a former master of understatement, overplays the big moments with visual frills, he keeps the outer and inner journeys in delicate balance. Despite the film's false notes, its ballad-like moods ring true.—*Richard Brody* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

DRAWING RESTRAINT 9
"The Simple Life" for a pair of self-important art-world celebrities. With a combination of lavish pageantry and industrial exertion, the Nisshin Maru, Japan's last whaling ship, sails off from Nagasaki Bay. Along with its crew, it carries two guests, Matthew Barney and Björk, who submit to elaborate rituals of tonsure, pomade, and dress at the hands of solemn bearers whose job it is to keep from laughing at their employers' airs. They partake of a classical tea ceremony in an unabashed display of Oriental kitsch that makes "Memoirs of a Geisha" look like an ethnographic documentary. As their berth fills with what might be water or whale oil, the couple lovingly carve each other up into human sushi. Barney, the director of this unbearably empty spectacle, has in effect filmed at great expense the couple's designer-sightseeing cruise, with little more skill and vastly more pretense than the average tourist.—*R.B.* (IFC Center.)

L'ENFANT (THE CHILD)
A boy is born to a pair of Belgian lovers, who seem hardly more than children themselves. Sonia (Déborah François) is pretty, pained, and underdressed, with broad bones and a dirty laugh. Bruno (Jérémie Renier) is a wastrel and a petty crook, with a hole where his conscience ought to be. He doesn't work, he spends money as soon as he gets it, and, on a whim, he sells the little boy; the remainder of the film, by Jean-Pierre

and Luc Dardenne, guides us through the aftermath of his folly. Many of the Dardenne trademarks, familiar from "Rosetta," are in place: the bleak and shabby backdrops, the quick but unflamboyant manner of the storytelling, and the urge to delve without scorn into the lives and morals of an underclass. Despite all those virtues, the new film feels laborious—Bruno's actions seem hollow and repugnant, fending off our sympathies, and his presence elbows out the more deserving cases of Sonia and Steve (Jérémie Segard), the teen-aged accomplice to his crimes. The film ends with Bruno in tears, but any parents watching will be far more concerned about the baby, who for some mysterious reason never cries at all. In French.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 3/27/06.) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

THE HEART IS DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS

Asia Argento directed, and stars in, this adaptation of the pseudonymous J. T. LeRoy's book of the same name. The seven-year-old hero, Jeremiah (Jimmy Bennett), has been brought from a loving foster home to the half-empty apartment of his mother, Sarah (Argento), who takes drugs and turns tricks for a living. The rest of the film is a dutiful course in degradation, complete with a roster of villains as well established as those of any soap opera. As an actress, Argento has not advanced to a significant degree since her ballsy turn opposite Vin Diesel in "XXX." As a director, she has a tendency to play leapfrog with the narrative at the exact moment when it threatens to hold our interest. This is a shame, because when Argento does stop to consider the changes that humans slowly wreak on one another, she can reach beyond the gross to a damaged sadness that many filmmakers would prefer not to ponder.—*A.L.* (3/13/06) (Sunshine Cinema.)

INSIDE MAN

A gang led by an unflustered leader in shades (Clive Owen) holds up a New York bank, taking a small crowd of hostages. Along come the cops (including Willem Dafoe) and a couple of expert negotiators (Denzel Washington and Chiwetel Ejiofor) who, unconvinced by the thieves' demands, begin to wonder what they really want. Other players include Christopher Plummer, as the bank's suspiciously smooth president, and Jodie Foster, as some kind of facilitator; her role is never quite specified, and you could say the same of Spike Lee, who directs the film as if barely enthused by the prospect of a heist. He mangles a few thrills, ignores the claims of logic, and underuses half of his tremendous cast. (The best cameo comes from Florina Petcu, as a shameless, cigarette-waving Albanian floozy.) What does remain, though, is a nervous riff on civic tension, a mean and funny turn from Washington, and—as you might expect from Lee—a constant, low-level venting of racial spleen.—*A.L.* (3/27/06) (In wide release.)

JE, TU, IL, ELLE

In 1974, the twenty-four-year-old Chantal Akerman filmed herself alone in a small room where she rearranged the furniture, lived on powdered sugar, and wrote one letter after another to an unnamed object of longing. This black-and-white film, composed of long takes with a static camera and frequent voice-over, is itself the passionate work of a deep artistic desire. Akerman leaves the apartment and hitches a ride with a truck driver (Niels Arestrup) who remains silent. After their wordless truck-stop meal, he takes her back to the cab, gets her to touch him, tells her his life story, and drops her off at the apartment building of another young woman (Claire Wauthion). The two women soon end up in bed, where they are filmed with an audacious erotic directness. This intimate yet remote melodrama was the first feature film by a daring director who does not separate her creative and sexual energies and yet frames them with a rare formal restraint that avoids bathos and self-pity. In French.—*R.B.* (Florence Gould Hall; April 4.)

PERFORMANCE

It plays better now as a piece of scabrous swinging-England memorabilia than it did in 1970 as a rock melodrama determined to blow your mind. Co-directed by Nicolas Roeg and the screenwriter Donald Cammell, the film stars James Fox as Chas Devlin, a sadistic East End gangster, and the spiky, ever-androgynous Mick Jagger as a reclusive ex-rocker named Turner. Chas, on the run from his ex-boss, winds up in the basement of Turner's mansion. The house philosophy is "Nothing is true—everything is permitted." The dictum also applies to Roeg and Cammell's hallucinogenic filmmaking. As Chas and Turner drill into each other's heads, drugs blur individuality, and pleasure-seeking blends into nihilism. This film may be a bad trip—but it's a trip.—*Michael Sragow* (Moving Image; March 31 and April 1-2.)

SHE'S THE MAN

This tween comedy, inspired by Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," has the pacing, casting, and dumbed-down plot of a sitcom, but Amanda Bynes, from the Nickelodeon variety program "The Amanda Show," brings a quirky spark and a redeeming loose humor to her role. Viola (Bynes), a soccer ace who is barred from the boys' team because of her sex, hatches a plan to go incognito as her brother, Sebastian (who is out of town), to prove she can play just as well as the boys. When portraying the ersatz Sebastian, Bynes not only looks, somewhat freakishly and rather convincingly, like a baby-faced young man but also uses her arsenal of facial expressions and her uncanny delivery to full comedic effect.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

V FOR VENDETTA

A dunderheaded pop fantasia that celebrates terrorism and destruction. The graphic-novel creators Alan Moore and David Lloyd conceived the material in the nineteen-eighties during the reign of Margaret Thatcher. Setting their work in 1997, they projected a fascist future for England and a rebel hero—a terrorist in a Guy Fawkes mask who blows up the Parliament buildings and the Prime Minister's residence. The producer, Joel Silver, and the Wachowskis, Larry and Andy, grafted references to the current condition of warfare and fear onto this template, lifting details out of Orwell's "1984" and a variety of pop myths. Hugo Weaving is the caped and masked man who kills and blows things up; Natalie Portman is the innocent who becomes his victim and his follower. The movie has some visual life to it, but it's so foolish that you come out shaking your head. Among other things, the ineptitude of "Vendetta" suggests that pop isn't a very good mode for political allegory. With Stephen Rea. Directed by the Wachowski brothers' protégé, James McTeigue.—*David Denby* (3/20/06) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

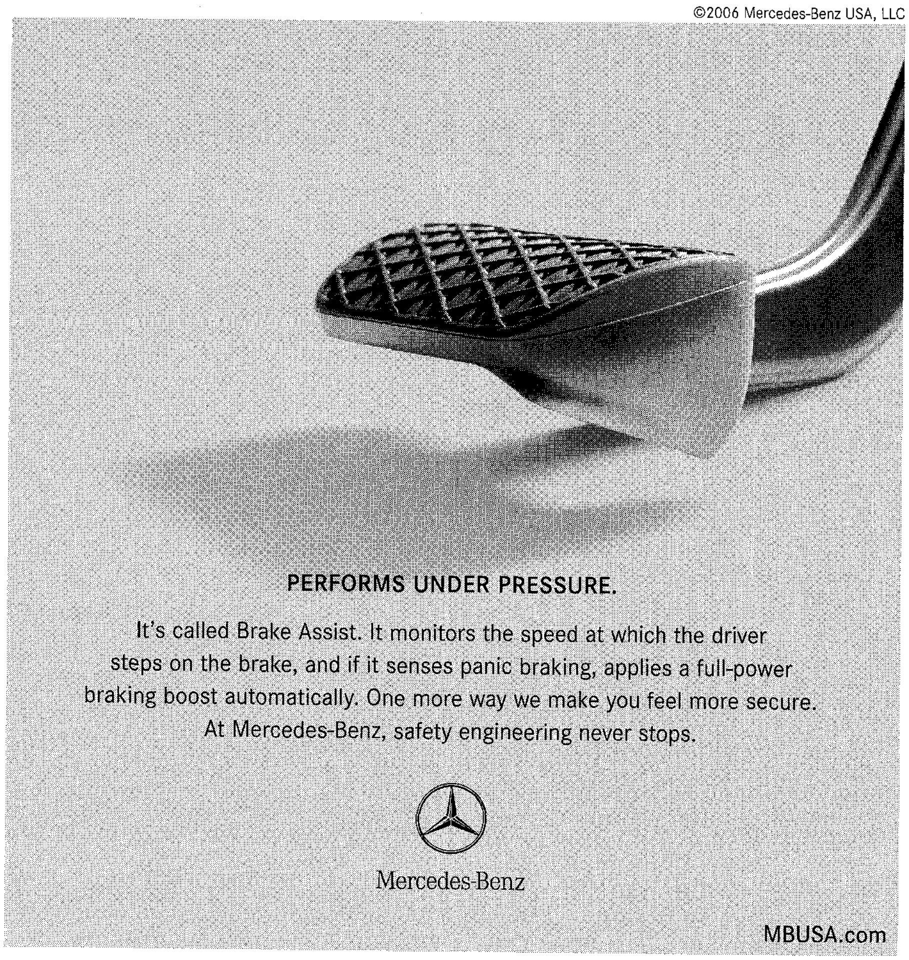
CRASH: In wide release. **THE HILLS HAVE EYES:** In wide release. **RUNNING SCARED:** In wide release. **16 BLOCKS:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"NewFilmmakers." March 29 at 7: A short-film program. ♦ March 29 at 8: "Cugini" (2005, John Gigante). ♦ The films of Takahio Iimura. All films are in Japanese. March 29 at 7: Early conceptual videos (1970-2004). ♦ March 30 at 7: "Japanese Film Independents" (1964) and short films (1962-64). ♦ March 31 at 8: "The Secret Life of Anthology Film Archives," a short-film program. ♦ "Essential Cinema." April 1 at 6: "The Pleasure Garden" (1953, James Broughton) and "This Is It" (1971, Broughton). ♦ April 2 at 6: "L'Age d'Or" (1930, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali; in French, no subtitles). ♦ Special screenings. April 1 at 8: Films by Shannon Plumb. ♦ April 1-4: Scottish Film Festival. For listings, go to www.tartanweekny.com. ♦ April 2 at 8: Films by Stuart Sherman. ♦ "Results You Can't Refuse: Cele-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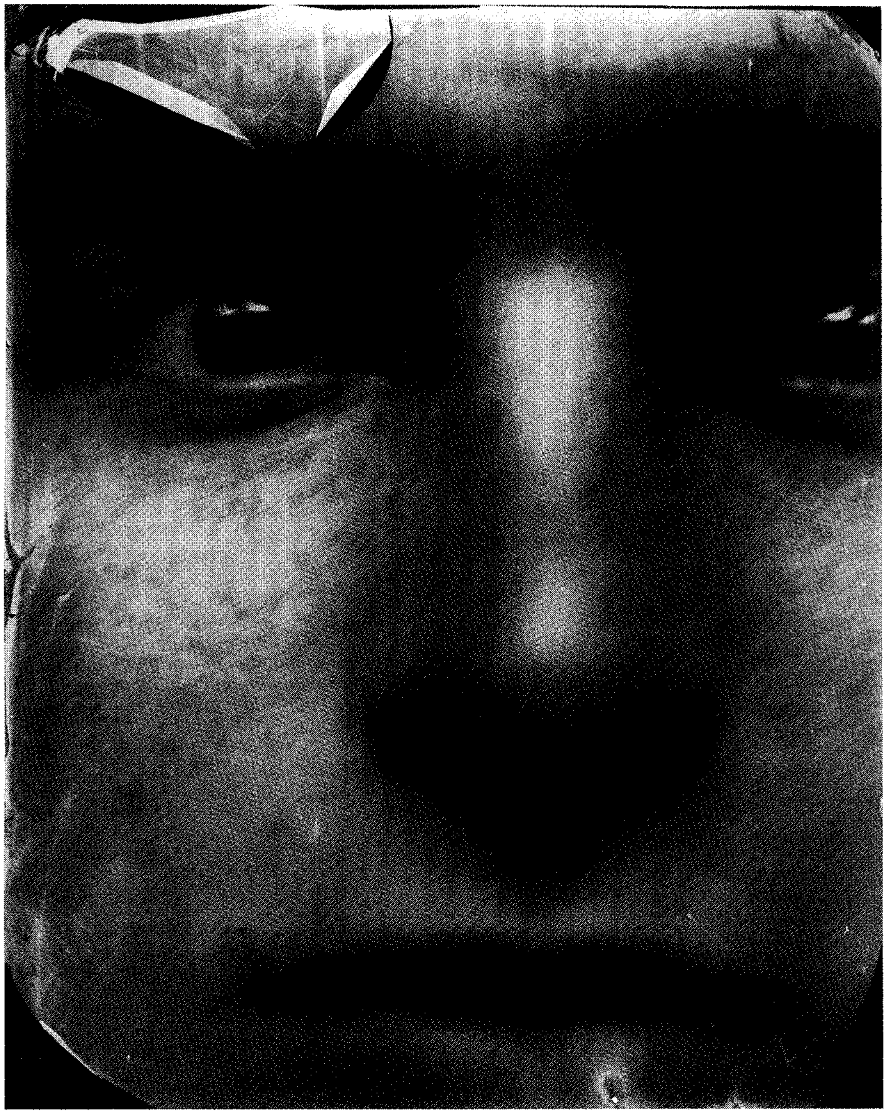

"Emmet #3," from 2004, by Sally Mann, at Gagosian.

brating Thirty Years of BB Optics." April 4 at 8: Films by Saul Levine, introduced by the director and Steve Greene.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Some Kind of Horror Show." March 29 at 6:50 and 9:15: "My Bloody Valentine" (1981, George Mihalka). ♦ March 30 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Witch" (1952, Roland af Hällström; in Finnish). ♦ Special screening. March 31 at 7: "Madame Curie" (1943, Mervyn LeRoy), followed by a Q. & A. with Curie's biographer Barbara Goldsmith. ♦ "Israel on Film." April 1 at 2 and April 4 at 4:30 and 9:30: "Ariel Sharon" (2003, Paul Jenkins) and "How I Learned to Overcome My Fear and Love Arik Sharon" (1997, Avi Mograbi). ♦ April 1 at 4:30: "The Juggler" (1953, Edward Dmytryk). ♦ April 1 at 6:50: "A Journey to Jerusalem" (1968, Michael Mindlin, Jr.), followed by a Q. & A. with Albert Maysles. ♦ April 1 at 9:30: "Black Israel" (2003, Maurice Dorès). ♦ April 2 at 2: "Exodus" (1960, Otto Preminger). ♦ April 2 at 6:50: "Keep Not Silent—Orthodykes" (2004, Ilil Alexander) and "Sentenced to Marriage" (2004, Anat Zuria). ♦ April 2 at 9:30: "Description of a Struggle" (1960, Chris Marker), followed by a Q. & A. with Phillip Lopate. ♦ April 3 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Jericho's Echo: Punk Rock in the Holy Land" (2005, Liz Nord). The 6:50 show will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director of photography, Steve Lerner. ♦ Free screening. April 4 at 6:50: "Promised Lands" (1974, Susan Sontag), introduced by Marie Nesthus.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through April 13: The films of Don Siegel. March 29 at 1, 4:20, and 7:40 and March 30 at 1: "Riot in Cell Block 11" (1954). ♦ March 29 at 2:40, 6, and 9:20 and March 30 at 2:40: "Private Hell 36" (1954). ♦ March 30 at 6:15 and 10: "Baby Face Nelson" (1957). ♦ March 30 at 4:35 and 8:10: "The Gun Runners" (1958). ♦ March 31 and April 1 at 1:40, 5:10, and 8:40: "The Killers" (1964). ♦ March 31 and April 1 at 3:30, 7, and 10:30: "The Lineup" (1958). ♦ April 2-3 at 1:10, 5:20, and 9:30: "The Shootist" (1976). ♦ April 2-3 at 3:10 and 7:20: "Escape from Alcatraz" (1979). ♦ April 4 at 1, 4:20, and 7:40: "The Duel at Silver Creek" (1952). ♦ April 4 at 2:40, 6, and 9:20: "China Venture" (1953).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through April 25: The films of Chantal Akerman. April 4 at 12:30 and 6:30: "Je, Tu, Il, Elle" (†). ♦ "A Couch in New York" (1996; in English and French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." March 31-April 1 at midnight: "Sugar Cookies" (1973, Theodore Gershuny). The April 1 screening will be presented by the actress Lynn Lowry. ♦ "New York International Children's Film Festival." April 1-2 at 11 A.M.: "My Neighbor Totoro" (1988, Hayao Miyazaki). ♦ April 1-2 at 11:30 A.M.: "Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind" (1984, Miyazaki). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction." April 4 at 7:30: "Iraq Unseen," a panel discussion and showcase of photographs and video clips.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through April 2: "New Directors/New Films." March 29 at 6: "Old Joy" (2006, Kelly Reichardt). ♦ March 29 at 8:45: "First on the Moon" (2005, Alexey Fedorchenko; in Russian and Spanish). ♦ March 30 at 6: "Into Great Silence" (2005, Philip Gröning). ♦ March 30 at 9:30: "Iron Island" (2005, Mohammad Rasoulof; in Farsi). ♦ March 31 at 6: "13 Tzameti" (2005, Géla Babluani; in French). ♦ March 31 at 8:30: "Pavee Lackeen" (2005, Perry Ogden). ♦ April 1 at 3: "My Country, My Country" (2005, Laura Poitras). ♦ April 1 at 5:30: "Things That Hang from Trees" (2006, Ido Mizrahy). ♦ April 1 at 8:15: "Twelve and Holding" (2005, Michael Cuesta). ♦ April 2 at 1: "Texas" (2005, Fausto Paradino; in Italian). ♦ April 2 at 3:45: "Wild Tigers I Have Known" (2006, Cam Archer). ♦ April 2 at 6:15: "Toi et Moi" (2005, Julie Lopes-Curval; in French). ♦ Through April 30: "Baseball and American Culture." April 3 at 6: "Bang the Drum Slowly" (1973, John Hancock), introduced by Carl E. Prince. ♦ April 3 at 8: "Headin' Home" (1920, Lawrence Windom; silent) and "The Jackie Robinson Story" (1950, Alfred Green), introduced by Carl E. Prince and David Levering Lewis. ♦ "MediaScope." April 3: "An Evening with Song Dong," video works.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—In revival. March 31 at 7:30 and April 1-2 at 6:30: "Performance" (†). ♦ Films featuring Anna May Wong. April 1-2 at 2: "Tiger Bay" (1933, J. Elder Wills). ♦ April 1-2 at 4: "Java Head" (1934, J. Walter Ruben).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—Special screenings. March 29 at 7:15: "Gay Sex in the 70s" (2005, Joseph Lovett). ♦ March 29 at 9: "Puzzlehead" (2005, James Bai). ♦ "Oy Gay! An Evening of Queer Jewish Film." March 30 at 7: "I Was a Jewish Sex Worker" (1997, Philip B. Roth) and "Tomboychik" (2001, Sandi DuBowski). ♦ Première. March 30 at 9, March 31 at 7 and 9, April 1 at 9, April 2 at 5 and 9, and April 3-4 at 9: "Toro Negro" (Pedro González Rubio and Carlos Armella; in Spanish).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." March 31-April 1: "Pulp Fiction" (1994, Quentin Tarantino).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Special screenings. April 2 at 3 and April 4 at 5: "Elevator to the Gallows" (1958, Louis Malle; in French). ♦ April 2 at 5 and April 4 at 7: "The Syrian Bride" (2005, Eran Riklis; in Arabic, Hebrew, English, Russian, and French).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through April 2: "New Directors/New Films." March 29 at 6: "Pavee Lackeen" (2005, Perry Ogden). ♦ March 29 at 8:30: "Eleven Men Out" (2005, Róbert I. Douglas; in Icelandic). ♦ March 30 at 6: "Texas" (2005, Fausto Paradino; in Italian). ♦ March 30 at 8:45: "John & Jane Toll-Free" (2005, Ashim Ahluwalia). ♦ March 31 at 6 and April 2 at 3:45: "Twelve and Holding" (2005, Michael Cuesta). ♦ March 31 at 8:30: "Things That Hang from Trees" (2006, Ido Mizrahy). ♦ April 1 at 1:30: "First on the Moon" (2005, Alexey Fedorchenko; in Russian and Spanish). ♦ April 1 at 4:15 and April 2 at 8:45: "13 Tzameti" (2005, Géla Babluani; in French). ♦ April 1 at 6:45: "Wild Tigers I Have Known" (2006, Cam Archer). ♦ April 1 at 9:15: "Toi et Moi" (2005, Julie Lopes-Curval; in French). ♦ April 2 at noon: "Into Great Silence" (2005, Philip Gröning). ♦ April 2 at 6:15: "My Country, My Country" (2005, Laura Poitras). ♦ "New Directors/New Films Classics." March 29 at 1: "Goshogaoka" (1997, Sharon Lockhart; in Japanese). ♦ March 29 at 2:30: "Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills" (1996, Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky), introduced by the directors. ♦ March 30 at 1: "A Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor of China" (1988, Philip Haas) and "John Huston and the Dubliners" (1987, Lilyan Sievernich), introduced by Haas. ♦ March 30 at 3:30: "The Devil Never Sleeps" (1994, Lourdes Portillo). ♦ March 31 at 1: "Witness to War" (1984, Deborah Shaffer and David Goodman) and

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Ties That Bind" (1984, Su Friedrich), introduced by the directors. ♦ March 31 at 3:15: "Who Killed Vincent Chin?" (1988, Christine Choy and Renee Tajima). ♦ Special event. April 3 at 6:30: "Contempt" (1963, Jean-Luc Godard; in French, English, German, and Italian), followed by a panel discussion.

READINGS AND TALKS

"SELECTED SHORTS"
The Upper West Side reading series pairing actors with short stories presents a night of stories chosen by Françoise Mouly, the art editor at this magazine, and her husband, the cartoonist and illustrator Art Spiegelman. James Naughton, Denis O'Hare, and other actors will perform. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. March 29 at 8.)

"ACCLAIMED/EMERGING"
The Poetry Society of America's series features Kay Ryan and Tomaž Šalamun, along with Andrew Zawacki. (New School, 65 W. 11th St. For more information, call 212-254-9628. March 30 at 7:30.)

WORDS WITHOUT BORDERS
The online literary magazine, in collaboration with Theatre Without Borders, a group of theatre artists from around the globe, has organized a reading of work by three international playwrights from its current issue: Zdenka Becker, from Austria, Jon Fosse, from Norway, and Koffi Kwahulé, from Ivory Coast. (Mo Pitkin's House of Satisfaction, 34 Avenue A. Tickets at the door. March 31 at 6. For more information, visit www.wordswithoutborders.org or theatrewithoutborders.org.)

"POETRY & THE CREATIVE MIND"
April is National Poetry Month, and the Academy of American Poets kicks it off with its annual benefit reading. Meryl Streep, Alan Alda, Wynton Marsalis, Julia Ormond, Oliver Sacks, and others will read their favorite poems. (Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. April 4 at 6:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

RINGLING BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY
The Greatest Show on Earth has returned to Madison Square Garden, complete with elephants, clowns, and acrobats. The only thing missing (besides trained lions) is the three-ring setup—the hundred-and-thirty-sixth edition of the circus dispenses with tradition and embraces new technology, including a giant video screen that will augment the story line. (212-307-7171. Through April 17.)

THE ORCHID SHOW
The annual display of the exotic flower, featuring more than eight thousand blossoms, continues at the New York Botanical Garden through April 2. (Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Road, the Bronx. For more information, call 718-817-8700.)

JAZZ APPRECIATION MONTH
Don't tell the poets (see Readings and Talks, "Poetry & the Creative Mind"), who thought they had April all to themselves, but this month also belongs to jazz musicians. JAM, as it is known, was established in 2001 by the Smithsonian Institution and recognized by President Bush and Congress in 2003. (Who says the current Administration doesn't support the arts?) Local events include the distribution of Jazz Trail maps, guides to clubs in the city; an open house at the Rose Hall, the home of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, on April 2; and a parade by members of the L.C.J.O. atop the Empire State Building, on April 5 (at the un-jazz-musician-friendly hour of 10 A.M.). Additional concerts and master classes are scheduled for the rest of the month. (For more information, visit www.jalc.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Sotheby's begins its second day of Asian sales (March 29) with an auction of Indian and Southeast Asian art, including several important paintings by such masters as S. H. Raza and Tyeb Mehta; the most valued lot of the week will appear in a sale of Chinese ceramics and works of art on the following day, a Yuan-dynasty jar with a subtle and complex decoration of waves, lappets, and scrolling peonies and lotus blooms, in which the artist's brushstrokes are visible. The week ends (on March 31) with a sale of contemporary works from China, Japan, and Korea, the first of its kind at the house. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ A large vase from the fourteenth century, impressive for its unconventionally freehand and vibrant cobalt-blue peony pattern and unusual double-gourd shape, is a highlight of a wide-ranging afternoon sale of Chinese ceramics and works of art at **Christie's**, one of three sales on March 29. On the following day, attention shifts southward for a two-part sale of Indian and Southeast Asian art, with classical pieces offered in the morning and examples from the increasingly popular category of modern and contemporary Indian art in the afternoon. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Asian-art aficionados may prefer the more casual setting of the **International Asian Art Fair** (March 31-April 5), where dealers will be selling a wide selection of armor, bronzes, jewelry, manuscripts, and art works. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 67th St. 212-642-8572.)

RACHEL DOMM

ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
HAVE FAITH
April 18

Brian Friel's 1979 drama, "Faith Healer," arrives at the Booth Theatre after a Dublin run. The fine cast includes Ralph Fiennes as a peripatetic miracle hustler, Cherry Jones as his enduring wife, and Ian McDiarmid as his devoted manager. (212-239-6200.)

MOVIES
TALKIN' TO YOU
April 25-May 7

Founded in 2002 by Robert De Niro and others in response to 9/11, the Tribeca Film Festival has become an alternative to the New York Film Festival. Among this year's offerings are "Comedy of Power," Claude Chabrol's melodrama about a French Enron-like scandal; "I Want Someone to Eat Cheese With," a comedy directed by and starring Jeff Garlin; and Guy Maddin's portrait of Roberto Rossellini, written by his daughter Isabella. (866-941-FEST.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
GOING WEST
April 26, 28, and 30

As part of Juilliard's centennial celebration, the school offers the world première of Lowell Liebermann's opera "Miss Lonelyhearts," in which the composer expands his late-Romantic style to suit Nathanael West's surrealistic novel. (212-721-6500.)

ART
MORE MORGAN
April 29

After a three-year renovation and expansion (Renzo Piano was the architect), the Morgan Library is reopening. The first exhibit will be "Masterworks from the Morgan," a survey of treasures from the library's collection of manuscripts—including a Gutenberg Bible, Mary Shelley's annotated copy of "Frankenstein," and the autograph manuscript of Mozart's "Haffner" Symphony. (212-685-0008.)

NIGHT LIFE
JUST SAY YES
May 2-3

The raucous local trio the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, led by the extravagant singer Karen O, are back with a new album, "Show Your Bones," and a pair of shows at Roseland that promise exuberance and cool in equal measures. (212-307-7171.)

FORGET THE MENU WANDER THE STREETS AND HIT UP LOCAL VENDORS

~~Menu~~

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·Appetizer·

~~French Onion Soup~~

Decadent Rings of Onion in a Delicate Buttery Broth, Topped with Cheese.

·Entree·

HOW 'BOUT SOME BUN CHA FROM VIETNAM?

~~Butter Poached Lobster~~

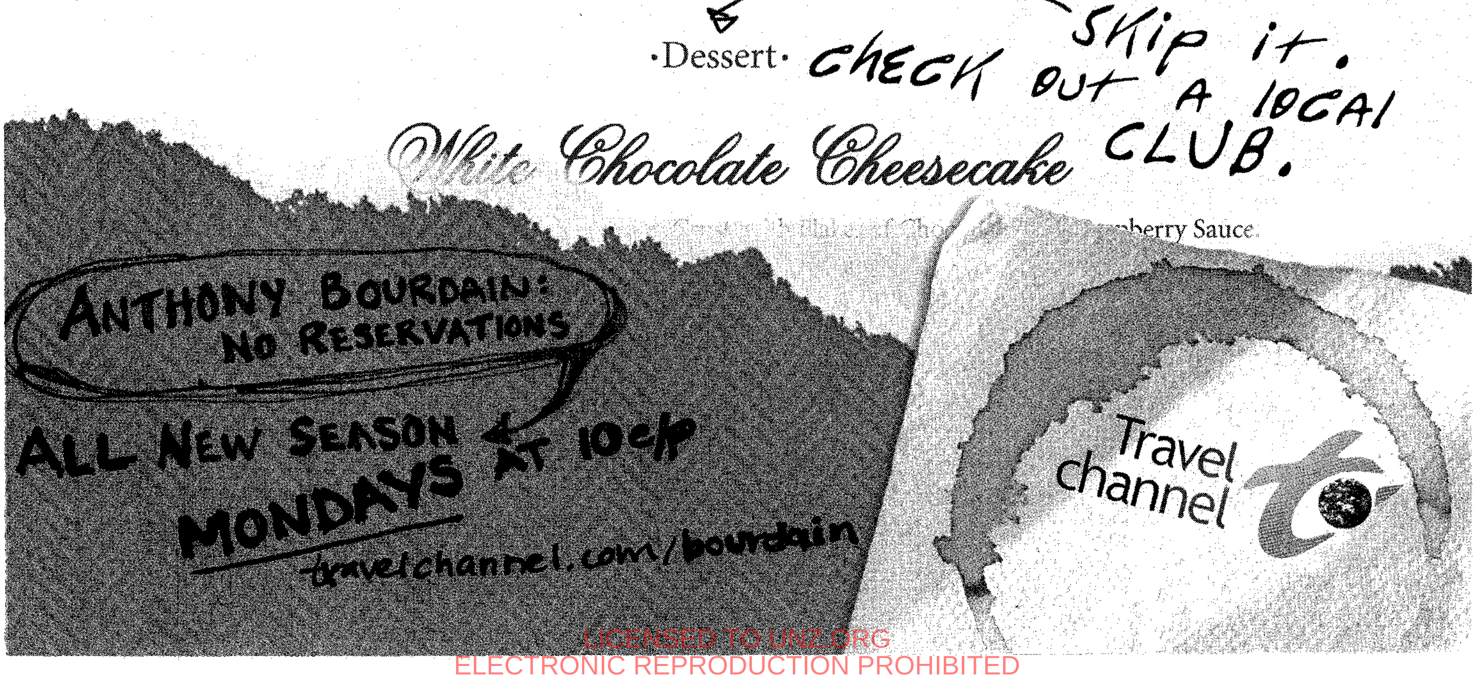
Butter Poached Lobster Tails with Caviar Mousse & Dijon Mustard Sauce.

·Dessert·

SKIP IT. CHECK OUT A LOCAL CLUB.

White Chocolate Cheesecake

[illegible] Flakes of Cho [illegible] berry Sauce.



ANTHONY BOURDAIN: NO RESERVATIONS

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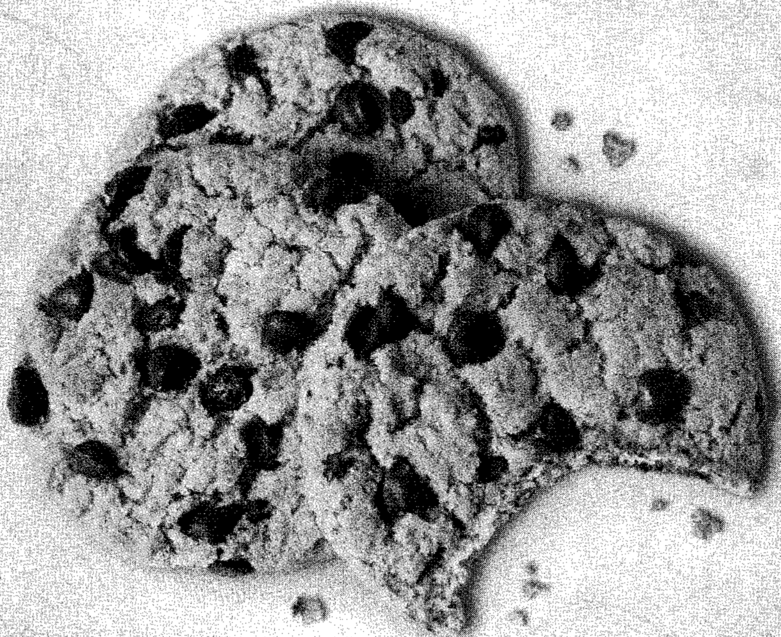

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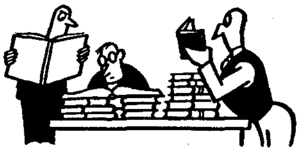
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

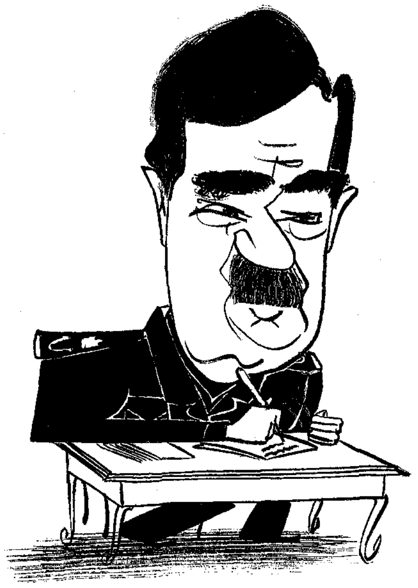
COMMENT
DELUDED



After the fall of Baghdad, three years ago, the United States military began a secret investigation of the decision-making within Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. The study, carried out by the U.S. Joint Forces Command, drew on captured documents and interviews with former Baath Party officials and Iraqi military officers, and when it was completed, last year, it was delivered to President Bush. The full work remains classified, but "Cobra II," a recently published book about the early phases of the war, by the *Times* reporter Michael Gordon and Lieutenant General Bernard Trainor, has disclosed parts of the study, and the Pentagon has released declassified sections, which *Foreign Affairs* has posted on its Web site. Reading them, it is easy to imagine why the Administration might resist publication of the full study. The extracts describe how the Iraq invasion, more than any other war in American history, was a construct of delusion. Frustratingly, however, we now understand much more about the textures of fantasy in Saddam's palaces in early 2003 than we do about the self-delusions then prevalent in the West Wing.

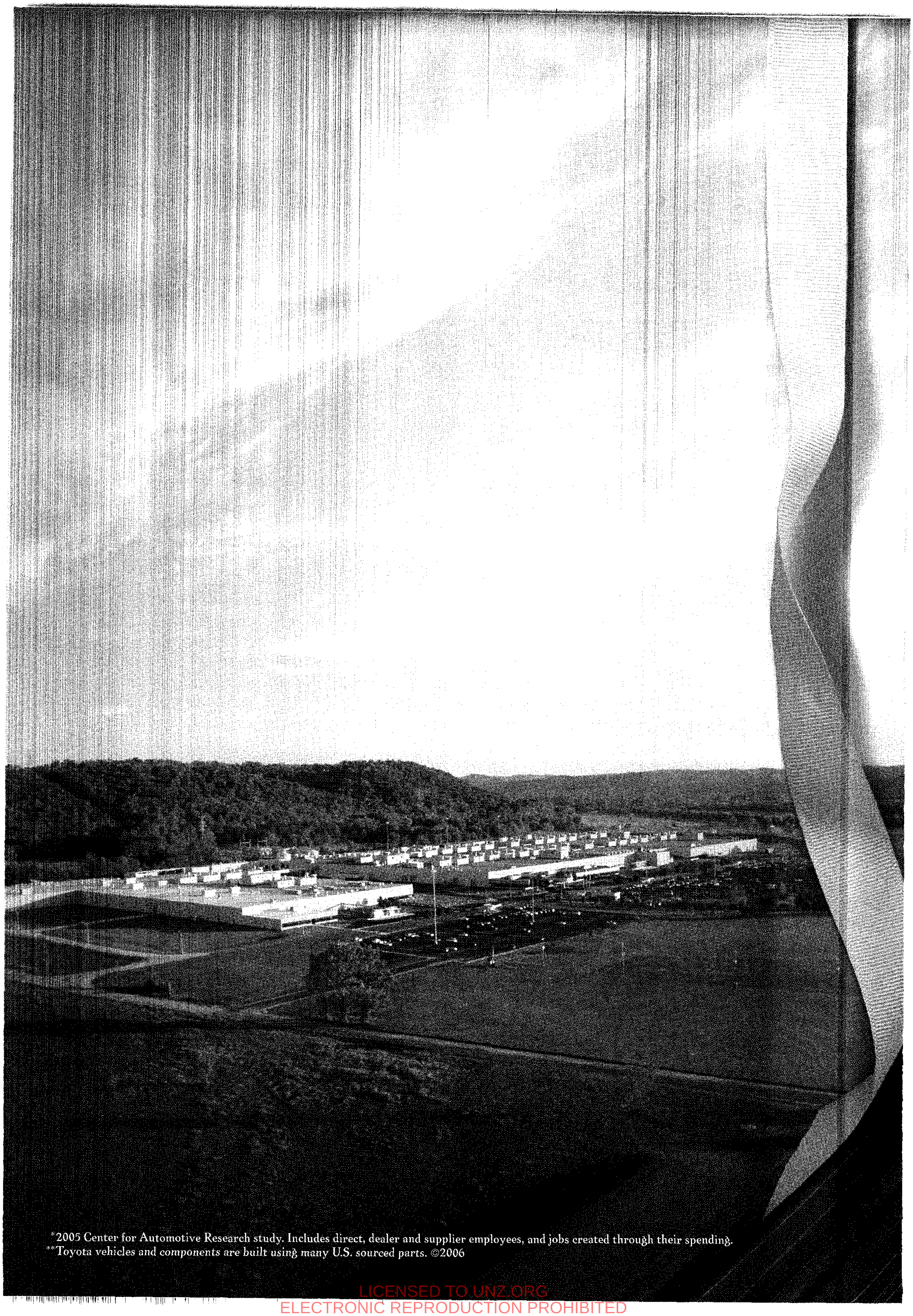
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The study portrays the Iraqi President as a fading adversary who felt boxed in by sanctions and political pressure. Saddam's former generals and civilian aides—such as his principal secretary, Lieutenant General Abed Hamid Mahmoud, and the former Iraqi foreign minister, Tariq Aziz—describe their old boss as a Lear-like figure, a confused despot in the enervating twilight of a ruthless career: unable to think straight, dependent upon his two lunatic and incompetent sons, and increasingly reliant on bluff and bluster to remain in power. Saddam lay awake at night worrying about knotty problems, and later issued memos based on the dreams he had when he drifted into sleep. As the invasion approached, he so feared a coup that he refused to allow his generals to prepare seriously for war. Instead, he endorsed a plan for the defense of Baghdad that essentially instructed his generals to talk with no one, think rousing thoughts, and await further orders. The generals knew that to question their leader or his sons was suicide, so they just saluted. "We're doing great!" the Minister of Defense wrote to his field commanders on April 6th, as Baghdad fell.

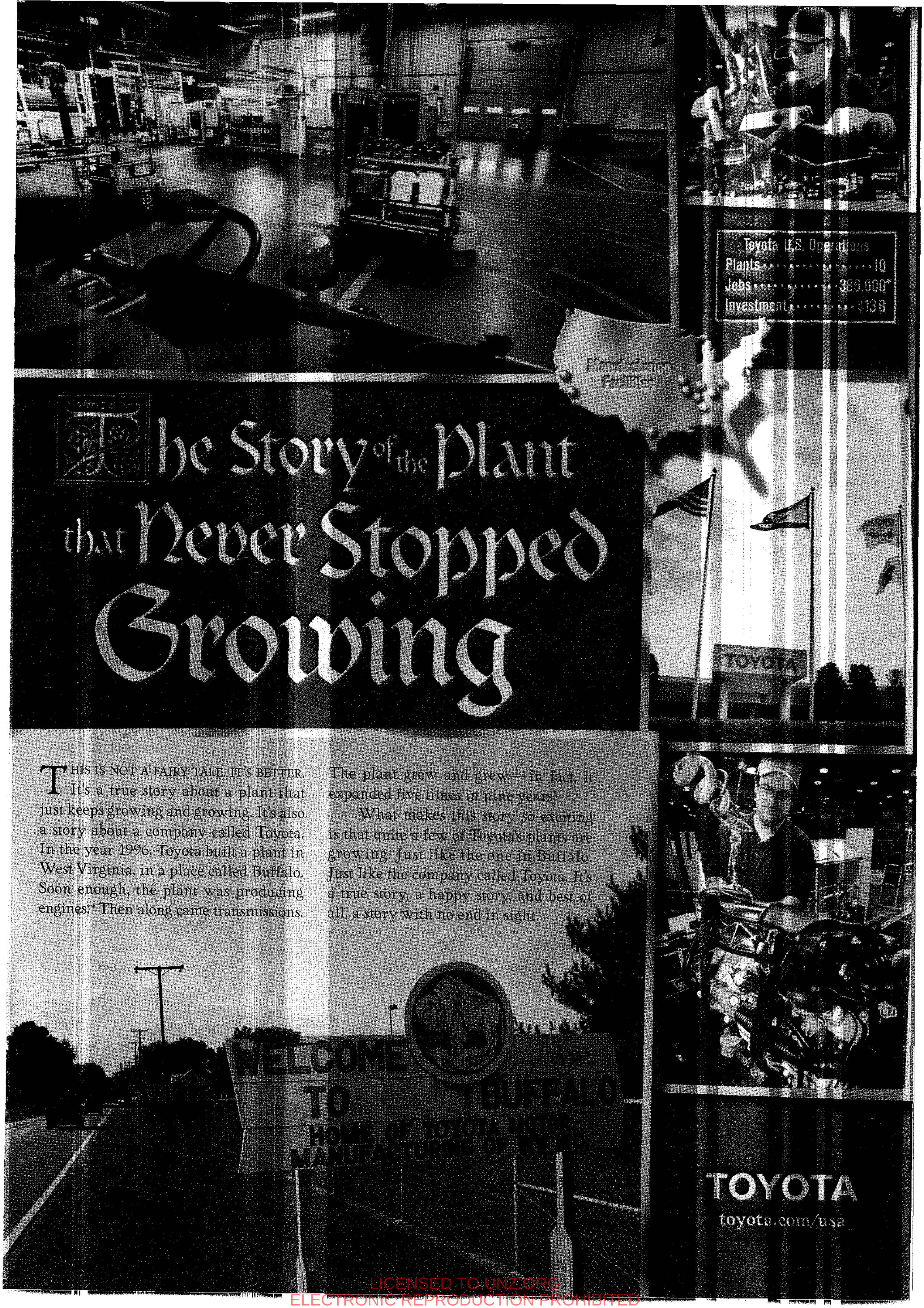


Nor did this sham mask any plan to foil the invasion by launching a guerrilla war. There has long been speculation that the insurgency, which has so far taken more than twenty-three hundred American lives, might have been seeded in part by clandestine prewar cell formations or arms distributions. In fact, according to the study, there was no such preparation by Saddam or any of his generals, not even as the regime's "world crumbled around it"; the insurgency was an unplanned, evolving response to the political failings and humiliations of the occupation.

As for weapons of mass destruction, there were none, but Saddam could not bring himself to admit it, because he feared a loss of prestige and, in particular, that Iran might take advantage of his weakness—a conclusion also sketched earlier by the C.I.A.-supervised Iraq Survey Group. He did not tell even his most senior generals that he had no W.M.D. until just before the invasion. They were appalled, and some thought he might be lying, because, they later told their interrogators, the American government insisted that Iraq did have such weapons. Saddam "found it impossible to abandon the illusion of having W.M.D.,"



*2005 Center for Automotive Research study. Includes direct, dealer and supplier employees, and jobs created through their spending.
**Toyota vehicles and components are built using many U.S. sourced parts. ©2006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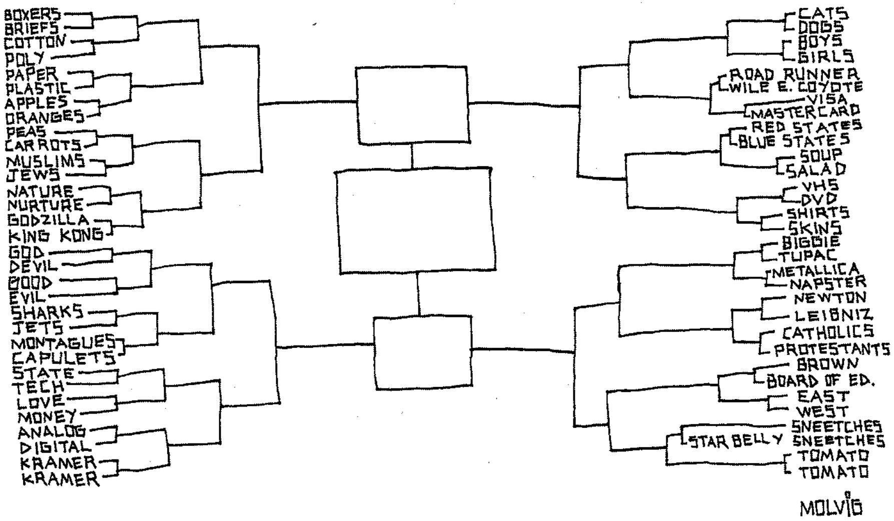
the study says. The Bush war cabinet, of course, clung to the same illusion, and a kind of mutually reinforcing trance took hold between the two leaderships as the invasion neared.

When the opposing armies finally crashed into each other in the desert, the professional officers fighting the war had in common a rich disdain for the self-styled strategists who had sent them into battle. Gordon and Trainor's extensive interviews with the Army and Marine generals and colonels who commanded the invasion show that they had almost as little faith in Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his aides as their Iraqi counterparts had in Saddam and his sons. Indeed, the American officers featured in "Cobra II" are remarkably open about the war's many errors of conception and execution. Of course, they do not seem to believe that any of the big mistakes were their fault—they blame the C.I.A. for repeatedly getting the battlefield intelligence wrong, and they blame Rumsfeld and his pliant subordinates for sending them to occupy Iraq with a force of inadequate size. The Army and the Marines have paid an extraordinarily high price for the war's compounding blunders, and, presumably, the officers are speaking candidly now not just to settle scores but to avoid such bungling in the future.

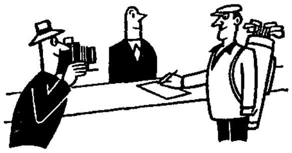
As usual, this transparency and self-reflection does not extend to the White House. Bush and Cheney—even with their approval ratings at historic lows and with Iraq veering toward open civil war—and their staffs still apparently find it impossible to admit error. In the week marking the third anniversary of the invasion, the Bush Administration delivered a portfolio of speeches and op-ed essays that seem even more arid and isolated than usual. (The President kept repeating his claim that he had a "strategy for victory," but he sounded as if he were reading texts from 2004 that his staff had forgotten to clear from his desk.) At the same time, the White House reissued a national-security strategy doctrine that blandly reaffirmed Bush's intent to "act pre-emptively," should he see the need, as if there were not a reason in the world to reconsider his assumptions.

The President and the members of his war cabinet now routinely wave at the horizon and speak about the long arc of history's judgment—many years or decades must pass, they suggest, before the overthrow of Saddam and its impact on the Middle East can be properly evaluated. This is not only an evasion; it is bad historiography. Particularly in free societies, botched or unnecessary military invasions are almost always recognized as mistakes by the public and the professional military soon after they happen, and are rarely vindicated by time. This was true of the Boer War, Suez, and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and it will be true of Iraq. At best, when enough time has passed, and the human toll is not so palpable, we may come to think of the invasion, and its tragicomedy of missing weapons, as just another imperial folly, the way we now remember the Spanish-American War or the doomed British invasions of Afghanistan. But that will take a very long time, and it will never pass as vindication.

—*Steve Coll*



LONG ISLAND POSTCARD
LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, GOLF



The season hasn't even begun, but it's been a tough few weeks at the Deepdale Golf Club. Founded in 1926 by William K. Vanderbilt II and situated on a hundred and seventy-five acres of rolling hills, it was intended, an official history states, as "a golf club with a small, select membership, a place for weekday play when there was no time for the train ride out to Southampton and The National." President Eisenhower, Bob Hope, Randolph A. Hearst, Henry Kravis, Sidney Poitier, Charlie Rose, Tom Brokaw, and Mayor Bloomberg are among those who have enjoyed the quick jaunt. Just this month, Deepdale suffered the loss of an esteemed member, the designer Oleg Cassini. And now the club itself faces extinction. The village of North Hills, which encompasses Deepdale, is considering a plan to invoke the principle of eminent domain to seize the facility. North Hills has suggested turning the world-class private golf course into a world-class private golf course, for dues-paying village residents only.

A confederation of about eighteen hundred households spread amongst many gated subdivisions, the village has a per-capita income of $100,093, so the usual eminent-domain rationale (appropriating private property for the betterment of the masses) doesn't quite hold. The fight, in fact, has the makings of a modern, haut-bourgeois Robin Hood tale: the rich robbing the richer in the service of universally accessible fairways. A 9 A.M. tee time for every citizen! Putt Free or Die! As North Hills' mayor, Marvin Natiss (handicap 23), said the other day, "I am elected by the village residents, not by the Deepdale members, several of whom are billionaires. As mayor, I represent the citizens of the village and have to do what's in their best interest." There are fifty-one golf courses within fifteen miles of North Hills.

Using the slightly anachronistic means of communication—open letters, conference calls, secretaries, lawsuits—so beloved of captains of industry, the members have mobilized a preëmptory campaign of characteristic efficiency and vim.

Ace Greenberg (handicap unknown), the Bear Stearns executive and a Deepdale member: "I was flabbergasted. They're not building an orphanage or a university or anything. We're gonna fight it."

The art dealer Bill Acquavella (handicap 12), the vice-president of Deepdale's board of directors, on the phone from Palm Beach: "Would you ever think they could take your golf course away to make it a public course?"

One day last week, John Wilson (handicap 10), the secretary and house chair, received a visitor at the clubhouse, a comfortably shabby Georgian mansion shaded by oaks and lindens. (It was originally the estate of W. R. Grace.) As custodians groomed the greens in anticipation of the club's April 7th opening, Wilson retreated to the library, a wood-panelled chamber that has been repurposed as a sort of war room. (Usually, according to a staff member, it's used by "wives waiting to pick up husbands.") He wore a green mock turtleneck with the Deepdale crest, along with tasselled loafers and creased black slacks. He was not in violation of the dress code, which stipulates that "tennis dresses, shirts without collars, designer jeans, dungarees, jogging attire, warm ups, shorts shorter than Bermuda length are not considered suitable anywhere in the clubhouse." His visitor, in Levi's, apparently was.

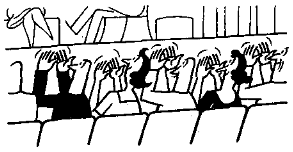
Wilson, a retired Wall Street executive, has been a member of Deepdale for twenty years, and is the only member of the club to reside in the village. (As such, he is the plaintiff in one of the lawsuits.) He said that the course, along with the service, which includes laundry, is excellent. "Fellows can come in right from the office in a suit, shirt, and tie and change right into golf clothes." He called the proposed seizure of the club "preposterous" and "surreal." "It's more than un-American," he said. "It's Communism. It's Socialism."

Wilson had to take a call, so a staff member agreed to give a tour of the premises. In the men's locker room, the lockers were furnished with gold nameplates: Alfred Taubman, Peter Peterson, Dixon Boardman. "This is the Governors' section," he said, before passing by a framed letter from the Duke of Windsor, who was a member. He pointed out dispensers that, in season, are filled with peanuts, pretzels, and gingersnaps, which members like to eat between rounds. Ken Langone and Frank Gifford share a locker.

"These are the lockers from the old clubhouse," the guide said. He explained that Deepdale had been forced to move in 1954. The Long Island Expressway now runs through the northern portion of the original course, a victim of eminent domain.

—*Lauren Collins*

ON THE BOARDS
MAC'S BACK



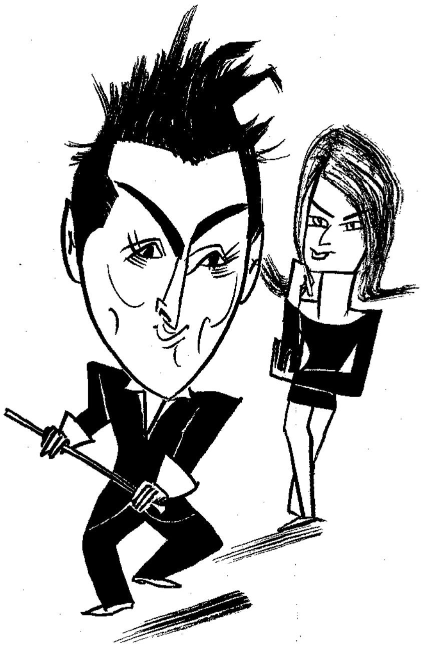
On a recent morning, Alan Cumming arrived at the Roundabout Theatre's rehearsal studio with a family-sized pizza box. "Your breakfast?" someone asked. "No," he replied, "last night's dinner." Cumming no longer looks the way he did as the m.c. of the nasty little Weimar night club in the Roundabout's 1998 revival of "Cabaret." Then he was like a weasel, a skinny, wiggly thing that could dive down the nearest sinkhole at the sound of a police whistle. Now he has bulked up. He has a chest, shoulders, and biceps, all of which he needs, for he has taken on the testosteronal role of Mac the Knife in the Roundabout's production of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's "The Threepenny Opera," directed by Scott Elliott. "We've got him doing pushups," says Aszure Barton, a wholesome-looking thirty-year-old Canadian with wind-chime earrings, who is the show's choreographer.

Cumming and Barton were working on a routine that Mac does when, after numberless crimes, he is clapped in Newgate Prison. Thanks to his connections, he is given a posh cell, and he celebrates it in a song that, in Wallace Shawn's new translation, starts like this:

> I've heard that starving geniuses are noble.
> They write their gorgeous verse in freezing garrets
> While sharing with the rats some rotting carrots.

Mac wants no part of that: "You can't eat poems with a fork and knife. / You must have comfort for a happy life."

Cumming is not a dancer by trade, and he says that when, in a show, he has to dance in unison with others he is filled with dread. "But that's the good thing about being the main person onstage," he adds. "They have to fit in with you." It is just such a routine, with Mac in front and others backing him up, that Cumming and Barton were rehearsing. Basically, it is a vaudeville step dance, studded with telling gestures. On "rotting carrots," Cumming swipes his finger under his nose, to signify distaste. On "a happy life," this man, who has embraced Polly and Lucy (he is married to both) and Jenny and Suky and God knows who else, pats his crotch fondly. Others of his actions are less translatable. They are just the physical emanations of a soul confident of its ability to get out of anything, including, shortly, Newgate. Cumming's body may have changed, but his specialty as an actor has not. He's a scoundrel and proud of it.



Alan Cumming and Aszure Barton

Like Cumming, almost all the members of the cast are not dancers but actors and singers. Jim Dale, a Broadway regular, and Ana Gasteyer, formerly of "Saturday Night Live," are Mr. and Mrs. Peachum. The singer-songwriter Nellie McKay plays their cheerfully corrupt daughter, Polly. Cyndi Lauper, in a rather frightening, furry getup—like all the costumes, this is the work of Isaac Mizrahi—

plays the seasoned whore Jenny Diver. Various others, including some local drag queens, will fill the remaining roles.

Barton, a well-credentialled modern-dance choreographer, says that creating movement for non-dancers is fine by her. Furthermore, she insists, all these people can dance; they just don't know it. "A lot of the stuff I've come up with, I got it from looking at them. I'm more interested in the insides of people, and in bringing that out physically. I don't want these dances to be steppy, like a lot of Broadway shows. I want them to be real." That's consistent with her other recent work: her dancers tear around on naked legs, their emotions pulling them, throwing them.

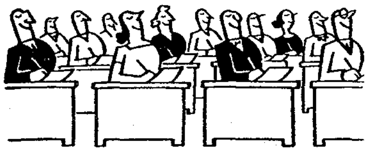
The "Threepenny" actors are on her side, she says. "I'm sure they think that what I do is completely strange, but in a good way." She also has faith in the power of Brecht's text, and Shawn's translation, to motivate their movement. Near the end, Mr. Peachum sings:

Men really aren't good,
So possibly it would
Improve them if you kicked their heads,
I truly think it would.

Mac and the others kick heads in return, and everyone has a nice, dirty good time.

—*Joan Acocella*

PENCILS UP!
THE S.A.T.'S WATCHDOG



The Web site of the test-coaching company the Princeton Review includes a feature called the "Vocab Minute"—a brief original song whose lyrics are intended to help students memorize the kinds of polysyllabic vocabulary words that come up on standardized exams. The current song is called "Rainy Day S.A.T. Blues #4000." It concerns a test-taker named Billy, who almost doesn't get into the college of his choice (Princeton, of course) because "the company that runs the S.A.T.,/it was a little nonchalant;/it let those tests get wet,/causing Billy to get/a score he didn't earn or want." (*Nonchalant:* feeling or appearing calm and relaxed.) The lyrics allude to the recent difficulties of the College Board, which in the past few weeks has had to notify more than a thousand colleges that forty-four hundred students who took the S.A.T. last October received scores that were too low, some of them by four hundred and fifty points. The problem, the board said, was excessive moisture in some of the answer sheets, which didn't register properly in the scanning equipment of Pearson Educational Measurement, the Iowa company to which the board subcontracts its S.A.T. grading.

The board's problems have also produced some hectic weeks for Robert Schaeffer, who is the public education director of the National Center for Fair & Open Testing, or FairTest, a nonprofit advocacy group. Schaeffer's telephone has been ringing constantly, with calls from reporters, college admissions officers, high-school guidance counsellors, and parents. He has also heard from more than a half-dozen law firms, several of which have been involved in other testing cases, including a successful suit against Pearson over scoring errors on a test administered to Minnesota high-school students.

FairTest was founded in 1985, when a friend of Schaeffer's who had been involved in battles over standardized testing "kidnapped" him, as he put it, and persuaded him to help with a project that ultimately became FairTest. Schaeffer had become interested in testing while working in M.I.T.'s now defunct Education Research Center. FairTest's current headquarters are in a rented house in Cambridge, Massachusetts, whose owner is a retired high-school guidance counsellor. "Our landlord, like almost all guidance counsellors, hates the S.A.T.," Schaeffer said.

In recent years, FairTest has suffered serious financial difficulties. Its budget—currently around two hundred thousand dollars a year—is heavily dependent on grants from foundations, which have been less generous than in the past. "We used to have as many as six full-time employees, and our offices were on both floors in the Cambridge house," Schaeffer said. "We're now down to the equivalent of one employee and about a room and a half." Schaeffer constitutes half of that employee. He now lives in Florida and devotes the other half of his work time to the Center for Civic Participation, a nonpartisan group whose principal concerns include voter registration and election participation—issues that, in Florida, at any rate, also involve machines that can't count.

People who worry about the deficiencies of machine-graded multiple-choice tests sometimes advocate replacing them with essay tests, on the model of the twenty-five-minute writing section that was added to the S.A.T. last year. Schaeffer said, "The so-called new S.A.T. is just a marketing gimmick. And the way the College Board grades essays, they might as well use machines." The board's human graders (mostly moonlighting teachers) are taught to use a method that the board calls "holistic" and that Schaeffer calls "a cyber sweatshop": the graders spend about two or three minutes reading a digital copy of each essay (scanned by Pearson), then grade it immediately, on a scale of zero to six. The College Board tells readers to base their evaluations on things like "clear and consistent mastery," but the truly decisive criterion may be simpler. Last year, Les Perelman, who is a director of the undergraduate writing program at M.I.T., reviewed a number of scored essays. "I discovered that I could guess an essay's prescribed score just by looking at its length—even from across a room," he wrote.

As for the current scandal, one significant issue that most people seem to have overlooked concerns S.A.T. scores that the College Board has *not* changed: those of the more than six hundred students who took the same test and were given scores that were too high. The board's rationale for letting those scores stand, a spokesman said last week, was that test-takers shouldn't be punished for the improper scanning of their answer sheets. But test-scoring errors are a zero-sum game. Giving students erroneously high scores is no different, either in principle or in effect, from giving students erroneously low scores, since both mistakes create an unfair advantage for one group of test-takers at the expense of another. Schaeffer said, "I think that the decision not to reduce scores was a very shrewd calculation by the College Board not to create more plaintiffs."

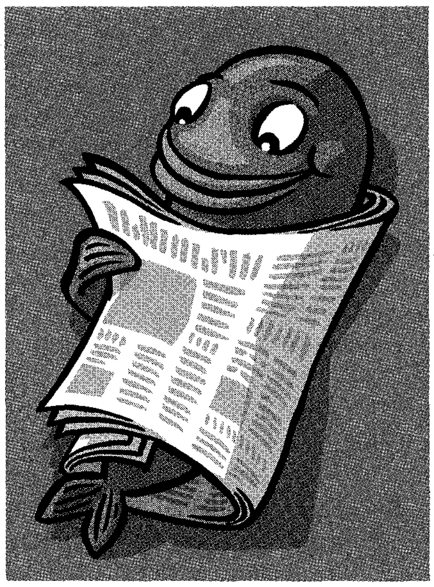
—*David Owen*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
PRINTING MONEY

Two weeks ago, when the newspaper publisher McClatchy announced that it was buying the venerable Knight Ridder chain, for the lowball price of $6.5 billion, McClatchy's C.E.O., Gary Pruitt, called the deal "a vote of confidence in the newspaper industry." But few people bought Pruitt's pitch (or his stock—McClatchy's shares have dropped nine per cent since the deal was announced). And why would they? At this point, everyone knows that newspapers are doomed. Lumbering apatosauruses reliant on old technology and a creaking business model, papers are losing readers—the Washington *Post* saw its circulation drop four per cent, to less than seven hundred thousand, last year—and losing ad dollars. The Internet has demolished the economics of the industry, allowing people to read, free, news from many sources, and providing a cheaper platform for classified ads. Habit may keep readers around a while longer, but spending billions on a collection of newspapers now looks like the proverbial shuffling of deck chairs on the Titanic.

But McClatchy's gamble depends on a simple, if often overlooked, fact: newspapers remain a surprisingly robust business and generate tremendous amounts of cash every year. Most of them have profit margins that dwarf those of the average company; McClatchy's operating margin last year was twenty-eight per cent, while ExxonMobil's was around sixteen per cent, and the typical supermarket's is around four per cent. The reach of newspapers remains huge. Daily circulation is around fifty-five million (not including online readers), giving the industry more customers than any other traditional media outlet. And those customers have the kind of demographics that advertisers like; even as circulation has dropped, revenue from print ads has stayed healthy, to the tune of more than forty-seven billion dollars last year. Newspapers are classic cash cows: solidly profitable businesses in a stagnant industry.

So why are newspapers everyone's least favorite enterprise? One reason is that Wall Street tends to love growth stocks, and to underplay the value of steady cash generation. And no one likes to be in a business that's losing customers. Still, there's a big difference between an industry whose customers are fleeing en masse (camera film, say) and one in which the decline is steady but slow; despite the current sense of panic, the popularity of papers is decreasing only gradually. Readership fell faster between 1970 and 1990—by fifteen per cent—than it has since, and even this audience drop-off is considerably less than what network news has endured in recent decades. Furthermore, a good deal of the decline can be chalked up to the life-style changes that killed the evening paper: since 1980, the circulation of morning papers has actually risen by almost sixty per cent.



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Meanwhile, newspapers have minimized the damage by getting better at making money off the readers they've kept. Some papers, such as the San Francisco *Chronicle* and the Des Moines *Register*, have deliberately reduced their circulation—usually by eliminating promotions and giveaways—in order to trim costs and improve their demographics. Consolidation has reduced competition to the point where there are now few multiple-newspaper cities. And newspaper chains have become relentless in their pursuit of cost-cutting. Although much of this has been bad for the art of journalism, it has been very good for the bottom line.

In some sense, the newspaper industry has succumbed to a speculative rush to judgment. People have looked at emerging trends—declining numbers of young newspaper readers, the boom in news and advertising on the Net—and decided that the future is already here. Yet, even in the age of Craigslist, newspapers benefit from the so-called "network effect." Since lots of potential buyers read the classifieds, potential sellers are more likely to list there, which, in turn, makes potential buyers more likely to keep reading. That's why seventeen billion dollars was spent on newspaper classifieds last year. And, while the Net has eroded newspapers' advantage in disseminating news, it has expanded their reach and influence. The Washinton *Post*, despite its drop in circulation, attracted more than eight million readers to its Web site in February, an increase of nearly three million over the same time last year. Papers may not have figured out how to maximize the monetary potential of this shift, but online advertising already earns them two billion dollars a year.

The real danger is that the popular conviction that papers are doomed may cause owners and shareholders to prefer the cash-cow approach, accepting eventual oblivion while continuing to harvest billions of dollars in profits, largely through cost-cutting. Settling for a tolerable short-term future, newspapers could end up writing themselves out of the long-term one. Yet it's also clear that this moment of supposed doom represents a sizable opportunity for newspapers, a chance to reinvigorate their product and, eventually, improve the economics of their business. Seizing that opportunity is going to require new investment, not penny-pinching. Established media—radio, the movies, television—haven't vanished when new forms have come along. They've adapted by playing to their distinctive strengths. (For most newspapers, this will mean abandoning things that are ubiquitous on the Internet, like stock tables and wire stories, and investing in content they can own, like serious local coverage and in-depth reporting.) Newspapers, thanks to the efficiency with which they've managed themselves in recent years, still have the time and money to save themselves. Instead of slowly sinking, why not steer around the iceberg?

—*James Surowiecki*

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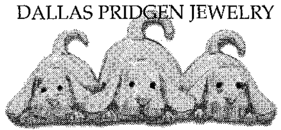

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MEDICAL DISPATCH

BEING THERE

Should patients' families see what happens in the emergency room?

BY JEROME GROOPMAN

One afternoon in 1982, a twenty-eight-year-old Michigan state trooper named Craig Scott stopped a speeding car on U.S. Route 127, outside Jackson. Scott discovered that the car, a Camaro, had been stolen, and arrested the driver. As Scott was helping the driver into the back of his patrol car, a passenger in the Camaro pulled out a .38-calibre revolver and shot the trooper three times in the back. Bleeding profusely and gasping for breath, he was taken by ambulance to Foote Hospital, in Jackson. As doctors tended to Scott in a trauma room, his wife arrived at the hospital, and so did several of his colleagues. In the lobby of the emergency room, Scott's wife pleaded with the hospital's chaplain, Reverend Hank Post, to let her see her husband, and Post agreed to convey her request to the physician in charge of the trooper's care.

"We debated back and forth," Post recalled. "The staff was very uncomfortable." Finally, the doctor went to Scott's wife and explained that the hospital prohibited family members from attending resuscitations. But she continued to insist, and eventually the doctor gave in. "It was hard to deny her with all those blue shirts staring you down," said Post, who accompanied the woman to her husband's bedside.

They watched as Scott was given blood transfusions and sent to the operating room for surgery, where he died. Over the next week, Post talked to doctors and nurses at the hospital about allowing patients' family members to accompany them inside the E.R. The doctors and nurses dismissed the idea; many argued that laypeople would have trouble coping with the stress of witnessing resuscitation efforts and patients' deaths. Post disagreed. Ordained in the Christian Reformed Church, a Protestant denomination, he was inspired by the Calvinist tradition of challenging prevailing dogma. He told me that he regarded his effort to open Foote Hospital's emergency room to families as a campaign for "human rights."

For several years, whenever Post was on call, he urged physicians to let patients' relatives sit in on resuscitation attempts, and, when doctors agreed, he stood with the family members next to the patient's bed. "It moved grieving along," Post said. "The families saw quickly how hopeless things were, and, by being present, the family can own part of what went on." In 1985, Post sent surveys to seventy people who had witnessed resuscitation attempts in Foote Hospital's E.R. Among the questions he asked was "Would you choose to participate again if the opportunity were presented to you?" Forty-four of the forty-seven respondents said yes. Several added that although the experience had been unpleasant, it had helped them come to terms with a relative's death.

In 2003, emergency rooms in the United States treated nearly a hundred and fourteen million people; about one in every hundred received CPR or underwent another kind of resuscitation procedure. Resuscitations are gruesome—physicians occasionally have to split ribs or cut into a windpipe in an effort to keep someone who is bleeding or unconscious alive—and just fifteen per cent, at most, are successful. Foote was one of the first American hospitals to permit patients' relatives to witness these procedures, but the practice, which is known as "family presence," is spreading, promoted in many instances by chaplains and nurses over the objections of doctors. (There are no reliable data, but advocates estimate that as many as half of American hospitals allow some form of family presence.)

In 1993, at the annual meeting of the Emergency Nurses Association, Patricia Howard, an emergency nurse from

Kentucky, submitted a resolution to the group's general assembly endorsing the policy on the ground that "when family members are prohibited from visiting before . . . death, the grief process may be hampered and left unresolved." To her surprise—the association had never discussed family presence—the resolution passed by a large majority. "We've always taken excellent clinical care, but not always excellent psychosocial care," Howard, who just finished a term as the association's president, told me. Family members who witness a resuscitation can help decide when to end efforts to revive the patient, she said. "We have had incidents where families say, 'O.K., you've done enough.' " Like many proponents of family presence, she argues that today Americans are better prepared for the gore of resuscitations than they were ten years ago, because they've seen realistic imitations of such procedures on television. " 'ER' and a lot of graphic programs have made the difference in terms of public expectations and knowledge," she said.

On television shows, two-thirds of resuscitations succeed; in real life, only fifteen per cent do. Photograph by Eugene Richards.

"ER" débuted on NBC on September 19, 1994; two years later, more than thirty million Americans were watching the program each week. Unlike previous medical dramas, such as "Dr. Kildare" and "Ben Casey," from the nineteen-sixties, which featured doctors in pristine white lab coats calmly talking at patients' bedsides, "ER" and its competitors, "Chicago Hope" and "Rescue 911," purported to depict emergency medicine as it is actually practiced. "ER," which was set in a fictitious Chicago teaching hospital, incorporated abundant medical jargon and relied on Steadicams—cameras mounted on the body—and multiple plotlines to create an aura of authenticity. (A typical episode featured patients suffering from severe asthma, premature labor, injuries sustained in a car accident, drug addiction, a genital rash, and heart failure.) In 2005, the American College of Emergency Physicians presented the series with an award for "educating the public about critical issues."

In 1996, researchers at Duke University Medical Center and at the University of Chicago analyzed ninety-seven episodes of "ER," "Chicago Hope," and "Rescue 911" and found that of the sixty patients who underwent resuscitations on the shows nearly two-thirds on "ER" and "Chicago Hope," and all on "Rescue 911," survived. Only one patient on the programs, a sixteen-year-old boy on "Rescue 911" who had inhaled toxic chemicals, endured lasting complications; in fact, patients who survive resuscitations often have brain damage or debilitating neurological conditions. The researchers, who published their findings in an article in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, maintained that "Rescue 911," in particular, tended to feature "miracle cases": younger people surviving acute injuries, rather than elderly patients with chronic heart and lung disease, who account for the majority of resuscitation patients. "The survival rates in our study are significantly higher than the most optimistic survival rates in the medical literature, and the portrayal of CPR on television may lead the viewing public to have an unrealistic impression of CPR and its chances for success," the researchers wrote.

A few years later, two doctors and a professor at the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, in Greenville, North Carolina, sent four hundred surveys to local churches asking members about their views on resuscitation. Nearly half of the two hundred and sixty-nine respondents cited television as a primary source of their information, and predicted, on average, that the survival rate from CPR was seventy per cent. In an analysis published in *Academic Emergency Medicine*, in 2000, the survey's authors cited the 1996 television study, writing that their own research "confirms that the events on these types of shows may be shaping and fueling the public's misconceptions of the effectiveness of CPR."

At the same time, patients and their families have become increasingly involved—and influential—in all aspects of medical care. In the mid-eighties, as the first anti-viral drugs for treating AIDS were being developed, activists demanded to participate in the design of clinical trials directed by the National Institutes of Health and pharmaceutical companies. Inspired by the activists' example, breast-cancer patient-advocacy groups made similar requests. The AIDS groups interrupted meetings and staged "die-ins" at the N.I.H., and, eventually, the physicians in charge of planning the clinical trials agreed to their demands. Laypeople now routinely sit on committees at the N.I.H. and on hospitals' institutional review boards, which assess the ethicality and scientific merit of clinical trials, particularly those involving experimental drugs or procedures. Yet family presence in emergency rooms, which is part of this larger trend, remains controversial. Not only does it represent an incursion by the public into medicine's inner sanctum; more than any other recent development, it reveals the extent to which the power to decide how medicine is practiced is no longer an exclusive prerogative of doctors.

The first emergency rooms were created about a hundred years ago, when hospitals began designating specially equipped "accident rooms" for the treatment of patients with severe injuries and illnesses, as well as for those who couldn't afford a family doctor. According to Brian Zink, an associate professor of emergency medicine at the University of Michigan and the author of "Anyone, Anything, Anytime: A History of Emergency Medicine" (2005), surgeons were largely responsible for the design of modern emergency rooms, which typically resembled O.R.s, with bright overhead lights and beds separated by movable partitions. Partly in order to maintain a sterile environment in the rooms, access was strictly controlled. "De facto, family members were excluded," Zink said.

After the Second World War, thousands of families moved from rural areas to cities, where there were not enough general practitioners to treat them, and by the middle of the century hospitals had taken over from family doctors the responsibility of caring not only for the seriously ill and injured but also for the dying. (Until the nineteen-sixties, many ambulances were simply repainted hearses, which were owned and operated by funeral homes.) As Gabe Kelen, the chairman of the Department of Emergency Medicine at Johns Hopkins University, put it, "Death became sanitized, and in the hospital families were spared from seeing the agony of dying." This is precisely what advocates of family presence want to change. (Policies regarding sick or dying children have traditionally been more flexible; many hospitals allow parents to remain with a child during at least some emergency medical procedures.)

Four years ago, Massachusetts General Hospital became one of the first hospitals in Boston to adopt guidelines on family presence. One afternoon recently, Ann Marie, a forty-seven-year-old woman, rode to M.G.H. in an ambulance with her father-in-law, Daniel, who had collapsed in a parking lot behind his apartment building in East Boston. (Names have been changed to protect the family's privacy.) Daniel was seventy-one and had recently spent a month at the hospital, where he had been treated for congestive heart failure. When he collapsed, he had been walking home from a local racetrack, where he had placed some bets. A letter carrier saw him fall and called 911. A team of firemen arrived and administered electric shocks to Daniel's chest in an effort to jump-start his heart. Then medics arrived in an ambulance and continued to try to revive him. A resident of Daniel's building saw the ambulance and called Daniel's ex-wife, who called Ann Marie. By the time Ann Marie got to the parking lot, the medics were preparing to lift Daniel into the ambulance on a stretcher. On the way to M.G.H., the medics gave Daniel oxygen through a tube inserted into his throat.

Patricia Mian, a psychiatric clinical nurse specialist, met the ambulance at the hospital. As the medics wheeled Daniel to a bed in the trauma area, Mian recalled, she told Ann Marie, "If you would like to be with him, you can. I will be with you as well, explaining everything that happens." Ann Marie said that she wanted to stay with Daniel, so Mian escorted her to the head of his bed.

Ann Marie remembered watching as one of the medics told the resuscitation team about Daniel's condition. A nurse named Eric Driscoll took notes on a clipboard, while another nurse cut away Daniel's clothes with a pair of shears. Keith Marill, an attending emergency-department physician, stood at Daniel's right hip; Kriti Bhatia, the senior resident in charge of the resuscitation, stood at the foot of the bed. A medical intern and a surgical resident were also present.

Daniel's skin was blue from the chest up, indicating that his circulation was impaired, and his pupils were dilated.

"We need central access," Bhatia remembered instructing the surgeon. "Please put in a femoral line." The surgeon splashed an iodine solution over Daniel's groin and pressed a gloved finger into the cleft between his lower abdomen and his left thigh, searching for a pulse in the femoral artery.

"He's pulseless," Marill recalled saying, palpating the same area on Daniel's right side. "Try your best to hit the vein."

The surgeon stuck a large-bore needle into Daniel's groin several times before he found the femoral vein. Then he threaded a long catheter through the vein into the inferior vena cava, a large vessel that rises from the abdomen to the heart. A nurse attached a bag of saline solution to the catheter.

As the intern compressed Daniel's chest, the nurse forced oxygen into his lungs by squeezing a balloon-shaped bag that was attached to the tube in his trachea. Gradually, Daniel's blue skin turned ivory. Ann Marie placed her hands on his head to comfort him. She noticed that his eyes were wide open and unblinking, which upset her. She glanced at Bhatia but, fearful of distracting her, didn't say anything.

Mian encouraged Ann Marie to talk to Daniel. "It's O.K., Dad," Ann Marie told him. "It's O.K. I'm here."

"He's in P.E.A.," Bhatia said, looking at a monitor by the bed. "Give him epinephrine and atropine." P.E.A. stands for pulseless electrical activity; Daniel's heart muscle was unable to pump enough blood to generate a pulse.

Ann Marie saw a nurse inject the medicines, but she didn't catch the names of the drugs or understand what they were for: to help Daniel's heart contract effectively and move blood faster through his vessels. Instead, she focussed on Daniel's face. Each time the intern pressed on Daniel's chest, it seemed to her that his bulging eyes might jump out of his head.

"His potassium may be high," Bhatia said. "I want a bolus of D50, ten units of insulin, with calcium and bicarb." (D50 is a highly concentrated glucose solution that, in the presence of insulin, will help draw excess potassium from the blood into the cells; calcium helps the heart contract.)

"He has a pulse!" Marill announced. The intern stopped pumping on Daniel's chest.

"His EKG shows a heart rate of eighty-four," Bhatia told the team. Driscoll noted that the resuscitation attempt had been under way for five minutes when Daniel achieved a stable blood pressure of a hundred and twenty-five over seventy-two.

Ann Marie had no idea that Daniel had revived. "I didn't know that his heartbeat had ever returned," she told me later.

Daniel sustained the blood pressure for seven minutes. Then Bhatia said, "Oh God, he lost his pulse."

"He's got a wide complex with an accelerated ventricular escape rhythm," Marill said, looking at the monitor. Once again, Daniel's heart had ceased to beat effectively.

A nurse administered more epinephrine and atropine, and Driscoll made notes on his clipboard.

"He hasn't got his pulse back," Marill said.

The intern began to sweat as he pressed on Daniel's chest.

"Keep pumping," Bhatia said. "We need an ultrasound." She lowered a wand over Daniel's chest which bounced sound waves off his heart. One cause of pulseless electrical activity is cardiac tamponade, a condition in which fluid accumulates around the heart and compresses it like a vise, preventing blood from entering the organ. The ultrasound would detect tamponade and show the strength of any muscular contractions.

"Does he have any cardiac activity?" Bhatia asked.

"Nothing happening," Marill said as he examined the ultrasound image. Daniel's heart muscle was flaccid.

"Does anyone have any other thoughts, suggestions, or is there anything else we should do?" Bhatia asked.

The doctors and nurses looked at her in silence.

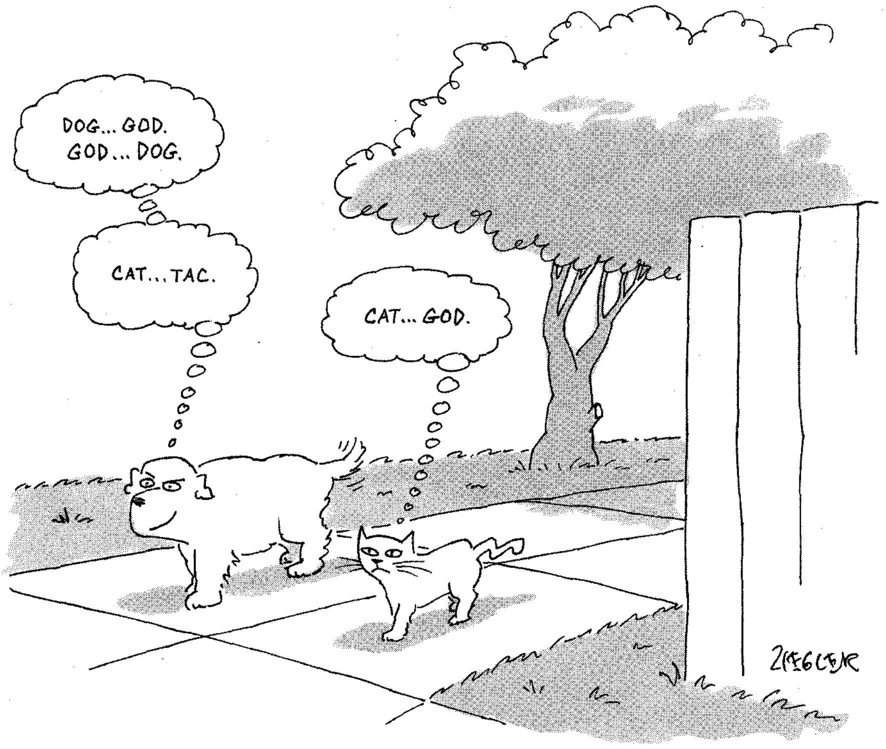
"O.K., I guess this is it, then," Bhatia said. Marill placed his stethoscope over Daniel's chest and listened for breath sounds. There were none. He felt Daniel's neck for a pulse and shook his head. Finally, he shined a penlight in Daniel's eyes. The pupils didn't respond.

Driscoll noted that Daniel was declared dead at 2:35 P.M., seventeen minutes after he arrived at the E.R.

Later, Ann Marie said that she thought that Daniel had been dead for a long time before the doctors and nurses stopped their efforts. She was troubled by his fixed stare, which made her feel that Daniel wasn't at peace, and, at her request, Mian asked a nurse to close his lids.

Ann Marie told me that Daniel "was the third family member to die in my arms." In 1974, she had been at her father's bedside at M.G.H. when he died, from complications of advanced diabetes, and she had cared for her mother until her death, ten months later, from brain cancer. Ann Marie said that she wasn't sure why she had decided to witness her father-in-law's resuscitation. "I think he was probably already dead in the parking lot," she said. "But it's so sad to die alone. I wouldn't want to die alone. I didn't want him to die alone. And when I was in the room I knew the doctors and nurses did everything they could."

I asked Ann Marie how she felt about what she had seen in the emergency room. "I used to be very sen-


DOG... GOD.
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sitive," she said. "My mother's and father's deaths made me stronger." Nevertheless, she added that she often pictured Daniel's eyes "jumping" in synch with the intern's chest compressions. "The whole thing was traumatic for me," Ann Marie said. "But I try to bypass it by making myself think of good things."

Few attempts have been made to measure the psychological impact of family presence, either on patients' families or on doctors and nurses in the E.R. Most of the existing studies consist of surveys and involve so few people that they cannot be considered significant. Addenbrooke's Hospital, in Cambridge, England, instituted a policy of family presence after completing a single study, in 1998, involving twenty-five relatives of people who had undergone a resuscitation at the hospital. Thirteen relatives were invited to witness the procedure (eleven chose to do so); twelve, who formed the control group, were not. Researchers surveyed eight relatives who had watched a family member die, at three months after the procedure and again three months later, and found no evidence of trauma. Moreover, these relatives said that they were pleased with their decision to observe the resuscitation. Despite the study's small size, it has been cited repeatedly in medical and nursing journals as proof of the therapeutic value of family presence.

In August, 2000, the journal *Circulation* published new guidelines for emergency cardiovascular care from the American Heart Association, which recommended that family members be allowed to witness resuscitation attempts. Two months later, at the annual meeting of the American College of Chest Physicians, in San Francisco, researchers from Tripler Army Medical Center, in Honolulu, distributed a survey about family presence to the attendees, who included physicians, nurses, and health-care workers such as respiratory therapists. Of five hundred and fifty-four respondents, the majority (seventy-eight per cent) opposed family-witnessed CPR for adults. More physicians (eighty per cent) than nurses (fifty-seven per cent) disapproved of the practice. The researchers, who published an analysis of the survey in *Chest*, a leading journal of thoracic medicine, found that where the respondents lived was a better predictor of their attitude toward family presence than the size or type of hospital in which they worked. Health-care workers in the Midwest were most likely to favor the practice (thirty-seven per cent); those in the Northeast least likely (twelve per cent). "While the reasons for these differences are unproven, we speculate that ten years of efforts by the Foote Hospital (Jackson, MI) staff may have taken root in the Midwest, making FWR"—family-witnessed resuscitation—"more acceptable in that region," the researchers wrote.

One group whose members have actively opposed family presence is the American Association for the Surgery of Trauma. In 1999, a team of medical researchers led by R. Stephen Smith, a trauma surgeon and a professor at the University of Kansas School of Medicine, in Wichita, surveyed three hundred and sixty-eight trauma surgeons and twelve hundred and sixty-one emergency nurses to learn their views of the practice. The respondents were asked to agree or disagree with statements such as "I would want to be present during TR"—trauma resuscitation—"following injury of a member of my family." Almost all of the nurses said they agreed with the statement; almost all of the trauma surgeons said they did not. Sixty per cent of the nurses approved of family presence during cardiopulmonary resuscitation and ninety-seven per cent of the surgeons disapproved, saying that it interfered with patient care and increased stress on the doctor.

In a 1999 report for the A.A.S.T. summarizing the results of the survey, Smith and four co-authors cited Federal Aviation Administration regulations instituted in 1981 to reduce the number of airplane accidents caused by distracted pilots. Known informally as the "sterile cockpit rules," the regulations prohibit crew members from engaging in activity that is not "required for the safe operation of the aircraft"—and which the F.A.A. defined as unnecessary conversation, eating, reading, radio communications, and public-address announcements. Smith and his co-authors argued that resuscitations involve tasks as demanding as those required to fly a plane. Like pilots, they wrote, emergency-room teams must assimilate large quantities of data in a short time and make quick decisions; potential distractions, such as the presence of a family member, could jeopardize the success of a resuscitation.

Smith argues that the debate over family presence has exposed a conflict in medicine between, on one side, chaplains and nurses, who worry about fam-

WOMAN IN GARDEN

Flinging flowers into the air,
as the adage goes
in the metaphorical bliss
of this metaphorical heaven:

that there are flowers still
to be gathered by alpenglow,
flowers at night in this garden,
flowers at waking and twilight,

whatever they look like,
whatever they come to look like,
whatever they've come to look like,
however we've made this garden.

—*Elizabeth Macklin*

ilies' emotional needs, and, on the other, physicians, who are primarily concerned about the quality of clinical care. In this sense, the debate is a sign of how power has shifted within the hospital; a movement led by chaplains and nurses to change a long-standing medical protocol would have been inconceivable when I was a resident in the emergency room thirty years ago. (Chaplains' tasks were limited to assisting patients with prayer and delivering last rites, and nurses, particularly in surgery, were viewed as handmaidens who should take orders but never give them.)

Smith's hospital has addressed the conflict by devising a compromise: patients' families are allowed to join them in the E.R., but only after invasive procedures have been completed and at the discretion of the trauma surgeon. Even so, Smith said, a family member's presence has sometimes been disruptive. In one case, a woman suffering from multiple fractures and internal injuries was brought to the hospital by her husband, who wanted to join her in the E.R. Smith and the other physicians who were treating the woman suspected that she might be a victim of domestic abuse and worried that she would be reluctant to recount her medical history in front of her husband. Eventually, the man was persuaded to remain in a waiting room. (The doctors determined that the woman had indeed been abused.)

Smith believes that hospitals should retain the right to invite a patient's relatives into the E.R. on a case-by-case basis. At the same time, he said, laypeople need to realize that they may not understand much of what they see there. "Even medical students don't know why certain things are done during trauma resuscitation," he said. "It's like me taking a tour of a nuclear power plant."

The hospital where I practice, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, in Boston, does not encourage patients' family members to witness resuscitations, though there is no official policy. Lachlan Forrow, an internist who directs the hospital's ethics programs, said that some doctors have favored family presence on the theory that if a patient's relatives saw how violent resuscitations can be they would be more inclined to agree to end efforts to keep the patient alive. But, he said, there is no solid evidence to support this view. A more fundamental problem, Forrow argues, is that laypeople don't necessarily trust doctors to make the right decision. "If the symptom of lack of trust is addressed by having blood splattering on the walls, then as physicians we've gotten ourselves into some kind of weird dynamic," he said. Forrow points out that there is no proof that witnessing a failed resuscitation is more therapeutic for a grieving family member than being told about it afterward by a physician. "Seeing a health-care provider inflict physical pain or disfigure the body of a loved one?" he said. "It seems to me that we should be able to accomplish transparency without that degree of brutality."

Keeping families out of the emergency room, however, ultimately may be impossible. "We are entering an era of openness in every field," Alasdair Conn, the chief of emergency services at M.G.H., told me. "You want to know whether your stockbroker is a good broker. You want to get a second opinion on a legal decision. It's happening in medicine, too. In many medical situations, there is no one right way to do things. There is this questioning, a search for alternative answers. It's different now, coming out in the waiting room and saying, 'We did everything possible, and your father died.' Then the families ask, 'Did you give the drugs? Did you do this? Did you do that?'"

Conn said that he had opposed family presence at M.G.H. until he imagined himself as a patient's distraught relative. "If my daughter or my wife or any of my relatives were in pain and in the emergency department, I would want to be there with them," he told me. "Even when they start putting in lines, or taking blood, or putting in a chest tube, or doing a resuscitation.

"Let me distill it," Conn continued. "Suppose you had the opportunity to spend the last three minutes on earth with your wife. She was just brought into the emergency room. She is semiconscious, and she is probably going to die. Would you want to say a few words to her, or would you rather be someplace else? I think most people would say that they want to be with her." ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

MY BILLY

BY PAUL RUDNICK

For the first eight years of his life, I was terribly worried about my gifted son, Billy. He had undergone endless testing and visits to hundreds of specialists, and he was eventually diagnosed with A.D.W., or Attention-Deficit What; then A.D.H.S.T., or Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Stop That; and, after that, A.D.P.O.Y.P., or Attention-Deficit Put On Your Pants. Finally, I realized that Billy is a Dandelion Child, a term used for unusually bright and active children whose special powers will someday change the world.

Shortly after Billy was born, I noticed that he possessed an unusual affinity for organic play, because whenever I took him on picnics he would eat bark. He also demonstrated highly precocious hand-eye coördination, because at only six months old he was able to fling his dirty diapers at strangers, laugh, and point to me. Before his first birthday, he was speaking in complete sentences, although he was using a complex secret language, similar to Karl Rove's.

Billy's early interactions with other children proved difficult, because his consciousness was so much more developed. For example, in the sandbox other children would use their brightly colored plastic shovels to fill their matching buckets with sand. Billy, however, would place his bucket over another child's head and then beat the bucket with his shovel, demanding, "Where's Waldo? I know you know."

I attempted to schedule playdates with other children, tykes who, sadly, insisted on wearing flammable clothing. It was after one such fruitless attempt that I first took Billy to be evaluated by a therapist, a limited woman who prescribed Ritalin, which only caused Billy to become drowsy and disoriented at odd moments, such as when he was hijacking a bus. The therapist asked Billy if he had any siblings, and I remember how his eyes sparkled as he replied, "Don't you read the paper?"

JULES FEIFFER

Next, I enrolled Billy in one of the city's finest private preschools for gifted children; during the interview I was especially proud when Billy showed the other children how wooden blocks make love. Unfortunately, even the school's most accelerated programs bored Billy, and he expressed his frustration by crawling around on all fours, grunting and searching for the truffles that he declared some of the little girls had hidden in their underwear. After being expelled, Billy comforted himself by writing a wrenching memoir of addiction, entitled "Boogers."

A series of other schools were equally repressive, and all I kept hearing was "Billy refuses to sit still," "Billy can't interact with a group," and "Billy covered another child with green finger paint and told her that now she could get a scholarship." That was when, thank the Lord, I discovered a Web site for the parents of other extremely advanced children, called AreYourPetsLimping.com. One generous mom suggested that I read two invaluable books by the pioneering child psychologist Dr. Irene Morningflower-Sanctum, entitled "Catching the Gifted Child" and "If He Can Poke, He Can Fly."

These works described the Dandelion Child phenomenon, explaining how a little boy could welcome his visiting grandmother with hugs and kisses and then create a narrative by murmuring, "I'm not Billy. You killed Billy. Don't you remember?"

The term "Dandelion Child" comes from the children's vividly colored auras, which are golden and sunny, and which, if you're not careful, can ruin your lawn. Dandelion Children are so evolved that the rest of us literally can't understand them, and not just because they enjoy tugging panty hose over their heads and announcing, "Look at me, Mommy. I'm a testicle!" As Dr. Morningflower-Sanctum once told me, as we took Billy for a stroll, "Your son has such compassion, far beyond his years. Watch how he leaves that realistic baby doll on a doorstep, rings the doorbell, and runs away. See the elderly couple reading the note? It says, 'Maybe this one will call.' "

Today, I am proud to report that I am homeschooling a happy, healthy, busy little Dandelion marvel, even if, whenever I try to embrace him, Billy still shouts, "Get off me! I'm not one of your husbands!" As Dr. Morningflower-Sanctum said, just the other day, "Let's peek in on Billy in my waiting room. See how he's bonding with my cat? He's teaching her that we're all connected, sometimes with shoelaces. He's an inspiration. He knows." ♦

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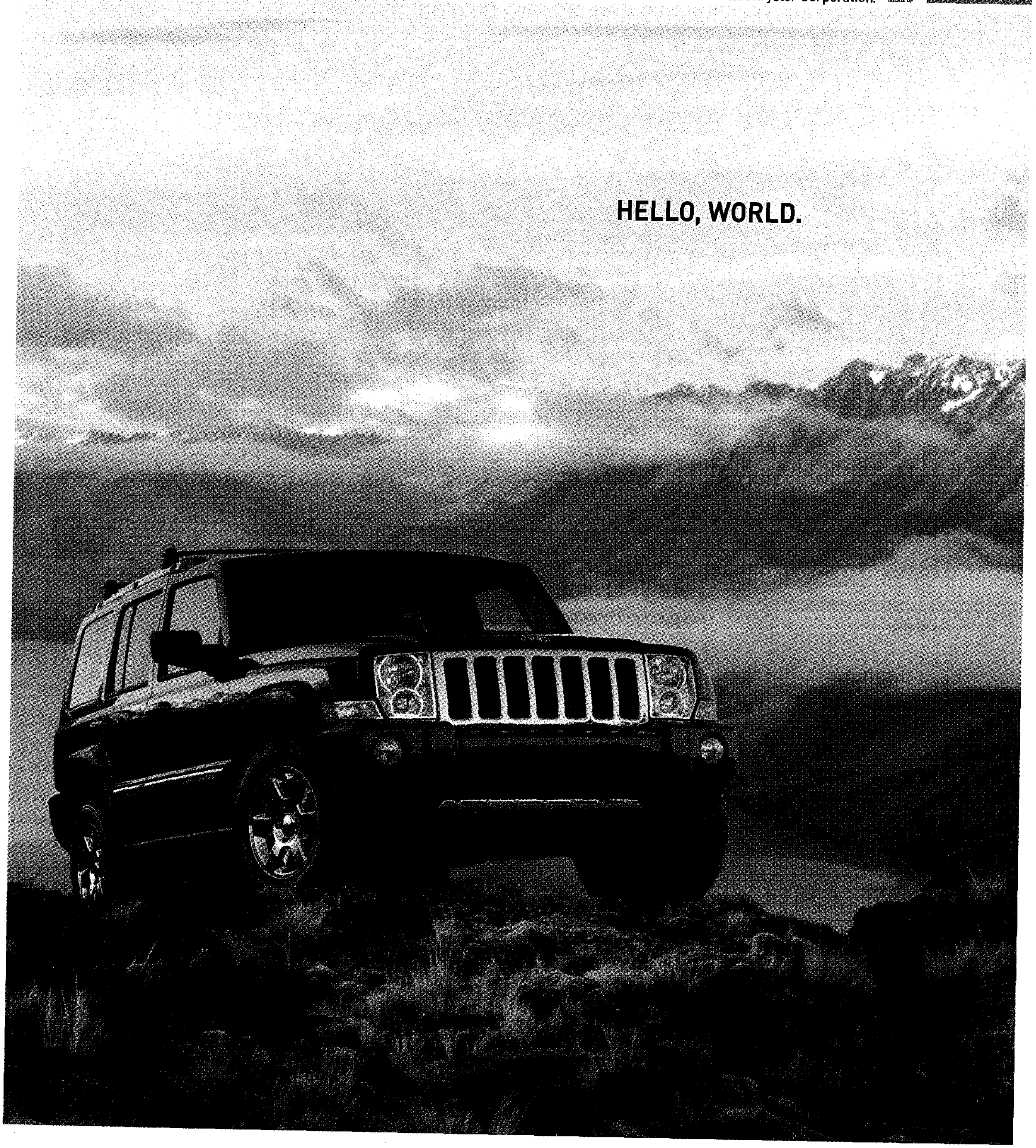

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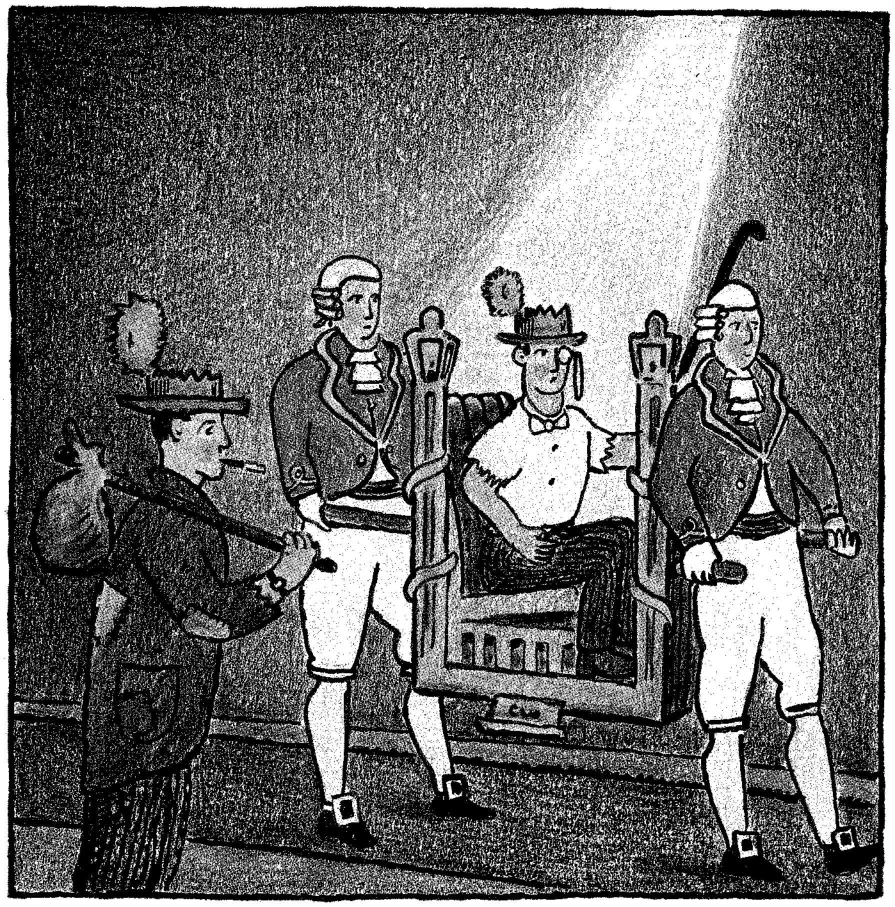
ANNALS OF ECONOMICS

RELATIVELY DEPRIVED

How poor is poor?

BY JOHN CASSIDY



The poor suffer not only from their own privations but from the wealth of others.

In the summer of 1963, Mollie Orshansky, a thirty-eight-year-old statistician at the Social Security Administration, in Washington, D.C., published an article in the *Social Security Bulletin* entitled "Children of the Poor." "The wonders of science and technology applied to a generous endowment of natural resources have wrought a way of life our grandfathers never knew," she wrote. "Creature comforts once the hallmark of luxury have descended to the realm of the commonplace, and the marvels of modern industry find their way into the home of the American worker as well as that of his boss. Yet there is an underlying disquietude reflected in our current social literature, an uncomfortable realization that an expanding economy has not brought gains to all in equal measure. It is reflected in the preoccupation with counting the poor—do they number 30 million, 40 million, or 50 million?"

Orshansky's timing was propitious. In December of 1962, President John F. Kennedy had asked Walter Heller, the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, to gather statistics on poverty. In early 1963, Heller gave the President a copy of a review by Dwight Macdonald, in *The New Yorker,* of Michael Harrington's "The Other America: Poverty in the United States," in which Harrington claimed that as many as fifty million Americans were living in penury.

The federal government had never attempted to count the poor, and Orshansky's paper proposed an ingenious and straightforward way of doing so. Orshansky had experienced poverty firsthand. Born in the South Bronx in 1915, she was one of six daughters of Ukrainian Jewish immigrants who barely spoke English. Her father, a plumber and ironworker, was often unemployed, and Orshansky and her sisters wore hand-me-downs and slept two to a bed. Sometimes the family stood in relief lines to collect food. Nevertheless, Orshansky attended Hunter College High School, which was then a school for gifted girls, and went on to Hunter College, where she majored in mathematics and statistics. In 1939, she joined the U.S. Children's Bureau, now part of the Department of Health and Human Services, and studied children's health and nutrition.

Orshansky never married or had children, but she was passionate about children's welfare. From 1945 to 1958, she worked in the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics, where she worked on a series of diets designed to provide poor American families with adequate nutrition at minimal cost. In painstaking detail, the food plans laid out the amount of meat, bread, potatoes, and other staples that families needed in order to eat healthily. These were "by no means subsistence diets," Orshansky later wrote. "But they do assume that the housewife will be a careful shopper, a skillful cook, and a good manager who will prepare all the family's meals at home."

In 1958, Orshansky joined the research department of the Social Security Administration, and decided to try to estimate the incidence of child poverty. "Poor people are everywhere; yet they are invisible," she told a reporter for the Dallas *Morning News* in 1999. "I wanted them to be seen clearly by those who make decisions about their lives." Building on pioneering research on diet and poverty conducted in York at the turn of the twentieth century by Seebohm Rowntree, a British social reformer, Orshansky used her food plans to calculate a subsistence budget for families of various sizes. For a mother and father with two children, she estimated the expense of a "low cost" plan at $3.60 a day, and of an even more frugal "economy plan" at $2.80 a day. Rather than trying to calculate the price of other items in the family budget, such as rent, heat, and clothing, Orshan-

GLEN BAXTER

sky relied on a survey by the Agriculture Department, which showed that the typical American family spent about a third of its income on food. Thus, to determine the minimum income a family needed in order to survive, she simply multiplied the annual cost of the food plans by three. Families on the low-cost plan needed to earn at least $3,955 a year; families on the economy plan needed to earn $3,165.

Orshansky compared these figures with the Census Bureau's records on pre-tax family incomes and concluded that twenty-six per cent of families with children earned less than the upper poverty threshold and eighteen per cent earned less than the lower poverty threshold. In total, she estimated that between fifteen million and twenty-two million children were living in poverty, a disproportionate number of them in single-parent households and minority neighborhoods. "It would be one thing if poverty hit at random, and no one group were singled out," she wrote. "It is another thing to realize that some seem destined to poverty almost from birth—by their color or by the economic status or occupation of their parents."

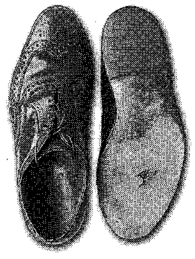
Heller and his colleagues on the Council of Economic Advisers cited Orshansky's paper in an "Economic Report to the President" that appeared in January, 1964, shortly after Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, declared a "war on poverty" in his State of the Union address. In August of that year, Congress created the Office of Equal Opportunity, which used Orshansky's method to determine eligibility for new anti-poverty programs, such as Head Start. Other federal agencies followed suit, and in 1969 the White House adopted a slightly modified version of Orshansky's lower threshold—the one based on the economy food plan—as the official poverty line.

In the nineteen-sixties, many economists believed that economic growth and government intervention would eliminate poverty. Between 1964 and 1973, as Johnson's Great Society programs went into effect, the poverty rate fell from nineteen per cent of the population to 11.1 per cent. But, while the nation's inflation-adjusted gross domestic product has virtually tripled since 1973, the poverty rate has hardly budged. In 2004, the most recent year for which figures are available, it stood at 12.7 per cent, a slight increase over the previous year, and in some regions the figure is much higher. The horror of Hurricane Katrina was not just the physical destruction it wrought but the economic hardship it exposed. In New Orleans, the poverty rate in 2004 was twenty-three per cent, a fact that George W. Bush noted in his address from New Orleans' French Quarter on September 15th, when he said, "We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action." (Six months later, the Bush Administration has yet to present an anti-poverty plan.) According to the Census Bureau, many cities are even poorer than New Orleans. In Detroit in 2004, the poverty rate was 33.6 per cent; in Miami, it was 28.3 per cent; and in Philadelphia it was 24.9 per cent. (In New York, it was 20.3 per cent.)

The persistence of endemic poverty raises questions about how poverty is measured. In the past ten years or so, significant changes have been made in the way that inflation, gross domestic product, and other economic statistics are derived, but the poverty rate is still calculated using the technique that Orshansky invented. (Every twelve months, the Census Bureau raises the income cutoffs slightly to take inflation into account.)

This approach has some obvious shortcomings. To begin with, the poverty thresholds are based on pre-tax income, which means that they don't take into account tax payments and income from anti-poverty programs, such as food stamps, housing subsidies, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and Medicaid, which cost taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars a year. In addition, families' financial burdens have changed considerably since Orshansky conducted her research. In the late fifties, most mothers didn't have jobs outside the home, and they cooked their families' meals. Now that most mothers work full time and pay people to help them take care of their kids, child care and commuting consume more of a typical family budget.

Another problem is that the poverty thresholds are set at the same level all across the country. Last year, the pre-tax-income cutoff for a couple with two children was $19,806. This might be enough to support a family of four in rural Arkansas or Tennessee, but not in San Francisco, Boston, or New York, where



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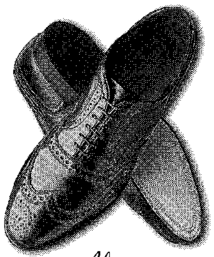

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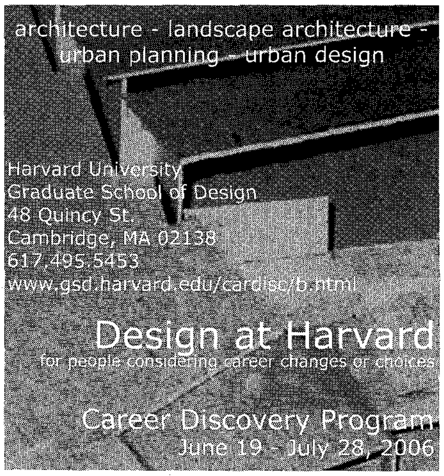

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the real-estate boom has created a shortage of affordable housing. According to Jared Bernstein and Lawrence Mishel, economists at the liberal Economic Policy Institute, in Washington, D.C., the average rent in working-class neighborhoods of Boston is about a thousand dollars a month, which for a family of four with a poverty-level income leaves just six hundred and fifty dollars a month for food, clothing, heat, and everything else. Bernstein and Mishel argue that in some cities the poverty thresholds should be twice their current level.

Such considerations suggest that the official measures understate the extent of poverty, but the opposite argument can also be made. The poverty figures fail to distinguish between temporary spells of hardship, like those caused by a job loss or a divorce, and long-term deprivation. Surveys show that as many as forty per cent of people who qualify as poor in any given year no longer do so the following year. Middle-class families that suffer a temporary loss of income can spend their savings, or take out a loan, to maintain their living standard, and they don't belong in the same category as the chronically impoverished. One way to remedy this problem is to consider how much households spend, rather than how much they earn. If in the course of a year a household spends less than some designated amount, it is classified as poor. Daniel T. Slesnick, an economist at the University of Texas, has tested this approach using figures that he obtained from the Department of Labor's Consumer Expenditure Survey, which tracks the buying habits of thousands of American families. Slesnick calculated that the "consumption poverty rate" for 1995—that is, the percentage of families whose spending was less than the poverty-income threshold—was 9.5 per cent, which is 4.3 per cent less than the official poverty rate. Subsequent studies have confirmed Slesnick's findings.

In 1995, a panel of experts assembled by the National Academy of Science concluded that the Census Bureau measure "no longer provides an accurate picture of the differences in the extent of economic poverty among population groups or geographic areas of the country, nor an accurate picture of trends over time." The panel recommended that the poverty line be revised to reflect taxes, benefits, child care, medical costs, and regional differences in prices. Statisticians at the Census Bureau have experimented with measures that incorporate some of these variables, but none of the changes have been officially adopted.

The obstacles are mainly political. "Poverty rates calculated using the experimental measures are all slightly higher than the official measure," Kathleen Short, John Iceland, and Joseph Dalaker, statisticians at the Census Bureau, reported in a 2002 paper reviewing the academy's recommendations. In addition to increasing the number of people officially classified as impoverished, revising the Census Bureau measure in the ways that the poverty experts suggested would mean that more elderly people and working families would be counted as poor.

Conservatives would prefer a measure that reduces the number of poor people. "The poverty rate misleads the public and our representatives, and it thereby degrades the quality of our social policies," Nicholas Eberstadt, of the American Enterprise Institute, wrote in a 2002 article. "It should be discarded for the broken tool that it is." In February, the conservatives appeared to make some headway when the Census Bureau released a report on some new ways of measuring poverty that could cut the official rate by up to a third.

Rather than trying to come up with a subsistence-based poverty measure about which everybody can agree, we should accept that there is no definitive way to decide who is impoverished and who isn't. Every three years, researchers from the federal government conduct surveys about the number of appliances in the homes of American families. In 2001, ninety-one per cent of poor families owned color televisions; seventy-four per cent owned microwave ovens; fifty-five per cent owned VCRs; and forty-seven per cent owned dishwashers. Are these families poverty-stricken?

Not according to W. Michael Cox, an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, and Richard Alm, a reporter at the Dallas *Morning News*. In their book "Myths of Rich and Poor: Why We're Better Off Than We Think" (1999), Cox and Alm argued that the poverty statistics overlook the extent to which falling prices have enabled poor families to buy consumer goods that a generation ago were considered luxury items. "By the standards of 1971, many of today's poor families might be considered members of the middle class," they wrote.

Consider a hypothetical single mother

with two teen-age sons living in New Orleans' Ninth Ward, a neighborhood with poor schools, high rates of crime and unemployment, and few opportunities for social advancement. The mother works four days a week in a local supermarket, where she makes eight dollars an hour. Her sons do odd jobs, earning a few hundred dollars a month, which they have used to buy stereo equipment, a DVD player, and a Nintendo. The family lives in public housing, and it qualifies for food stamps and Medicaid. Under the Earned Income Tax Credit program, the mother would receive roughly four thousand dollars from the federal government each year. Compared with the destitute in Africa and Asia, this family is unimaginably rich. Compared with a poor American family of thirty years ago, it may be slightly better off. Compared with a typical two-income family in the suburbs, it is poor.

The concept of relative deprivation was first described by Adam Smith in "The Wealth of Nations," in a passage on the "necessaries" of daily life:

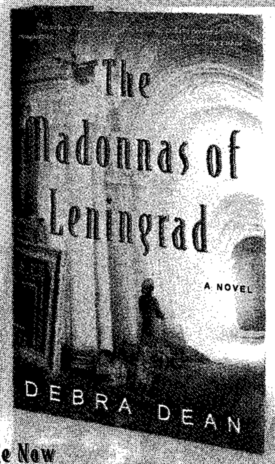
> By necessaries I understand not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but what ever the customs of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even the lowest order, to be without. A linen shirt, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably, though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-laborer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty which, it is presumed, nobody can well fall into, without extreme bad conduct. Custom, in the same manner, has rendered leather shoes a necessary of life in England.

For decades, economists overlooked Smith's analysis, and it was left to sociologists and anthropologists to study the impact of relative deprivation. During the Second World War, Samuel A. Stouffer, a sociologist at the University of Chicago, and a team of researchers compared the levels of job satisfaction reported by members of the military police, a profession in which few people were promoted, and members of the Army Air Force, where there were frequent opportunities for advancement. To the researchers' surprise, the policemen reported greater happiness in their jobs than the airmen. One possible explanation, the researchers speculated, is that the policemen tended to compare themselves with colleagues who hadn't been promoted, whereas the "reference group" for the airmen was colleagues who had been promoted. "The more people a man sees promoted when he is not promoted himself," the Cambridge University sociologist W. G. Runciman wrote in 1966, in his book "Relative Deprivation and Social Justice," "the more people he may compare himself to in a situation where the comparison will make him feel relatively deprived."

More recently, three economists at the University of Warwick published the results of a survey of sixteen thousand workers in a range of industries, in which they found that the workers' reported levels of job satisfaction had less to do with their salaries than with how their salaries compared with those of co-workers. Human beings are also competitive with their neighbors. Erzo Luttmer, an economist at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, recently found that people with rich neighbors tend to be less happy than people whose neighbors earn about as much money as they do. It appears that, while money matters to people, their relative ranking matters more.

Relative deprivation is also bad for your health. In a famous study conducted between 1967 and 1977, a team of epidemiologists led by Sir Michael Marmot, of University College London, monitored the health of more than seventeen thousand members of Britain's Civil Service, a highly stratified bureaucracy. Marmot and his colleagues found that people who had been promoted to the top ranks—those who worked directly for cabinet ministers—lived longer than their colleagues in lower-ranking jobs. Mid-level civil servants were more likely than their bosses to develop a range of potentially deadly conditions, including heart disease, high blood pressure, lung cancer, and gastrointestinal ailments.

Initially, some critics suggested that these results could be attributed to differences in behavior: members of the lower ranks were more likely to smoke and drink and less likely to exercise and eat healthily than their better-paid superiors. To test this theory, Marmot and his team have been conducting a follow-up study of civil servants, which began in 1985 and continues to this day. This survey has confirmed the results of the first study, and has also suggested that less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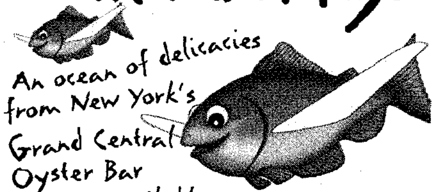
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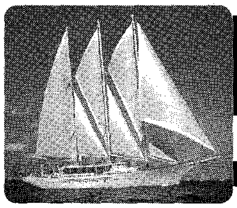
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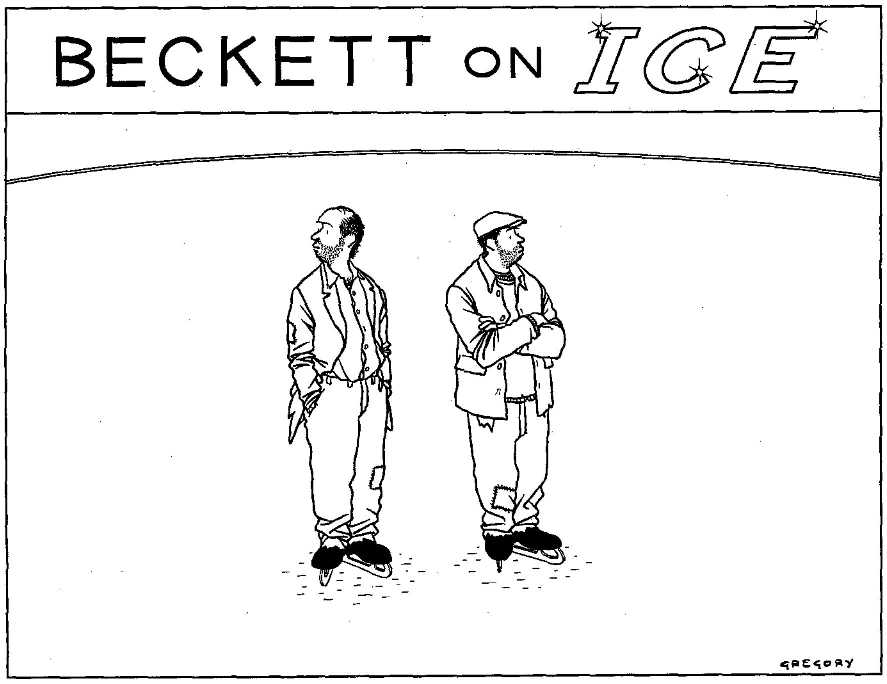
than a third of the difference in patterns of disease and mortality can be ascribed to behavior associated with coronary risk, such as smoking or lack of exercise. "The higher the social position, the longer people can expect to live, and the less disease they can expect to suffer," Marmot explained in a recent paper. "This is the social gradient in health."

The British findings have been replicated in other parts of the world, including the United States. Amartya Sen, who won the 1998 Nobel in economics, has pointed out that African-Americans as a group have a smaller chance of reaching old age than Indians born in the impoverished state of Kerala, who are much poorer. Part of the reason may be the high rate of homicide deaths among young African-American men, but African-American women also have higher mortality rates than women in Kerala. "So it is not only the case that American blacks suffer from relative deprivation in terms of income per head vis-à-vis American whites," Sen wrote in his 1999 book, "Development as Freedom." "They also are absolutely more deprived than the low-income Indians in Kerala."

The epidemiological studies don't explain how relative deprivation damages people's health; they simply suggest that there is a connection. One possibility is that subordination leads to stress, which damages the body's immune system. In the animal kingdom, where there are bitter fights over relative status, there is evidence supporting this hypothesis. The neurobiologist Robert Sapolsky has described how dominant baboons in troops on the African plains verbally and physically abuse their subordinates. When Sapolsky analyzed blood samples from low-ranking baboons, he found high levels of a hormone associated with stress. Other scientists have shown that dominant rhesus monkeys have lower rates of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) than monkeys further down the social hierarchy, and when dominant female monkeys are relegated to a subordinate status their rate of heart disease goes up.

"Given the animal results," Angus Deaton, a Princeton economist who is an expert on poverty, wrote in a recent paper about relative deprivation and mortality, "the degree to which low rank is harmful to an individual is likely to depend on the number of people of higher rank, because each such person is in a position to deliver the threats, insults, enforced obeisance, or ultimate violence that generate stress. Individuals who are insulted by those immediately above them insult those immediately below them, generating a cascade of threats and violence through which low-ranked individuals feel the burden, not just of their immediate superiors, but of the whole hierarchy above them."

Poor health may be the most dramatic consequence of relative deprivation, but there are more subtle effects as well. Although many poor families own appliances once associated with rich households, such as color televisions and dishwashers, they live in a society in which many families also possess DVD players, cell phones, desktop computers, broadband Internet connections, powerful game consoles, S.U.V.s, health-club memberships, and vacation homes. Without access to these goods, children from poor families may lack skills—such as how to surf the Web for help-wanted ads—that could enhance their prospects in the job market. In other words, relative deprivation may limit a person's capacity for social achievement. As Sen put it, "Being relatively poor in a rich country can be a great capability handicap, even when one's absolute income is high in terms of world standards." Research by Tom Hertz, an economist at American University, shows that a child whose parents are in the bottom fifth of the income distribution has only a six-per-cent chance of attaining an average yearly income in the top fifth. Most people who start out relatively poor stay relatively poor.



Since relative deprivation confers many of the disadvantages of absolute deprivation, it should be reflected in the poverty statistics. A simple way to do this would be to classify a household as impoverished if its pre-tax income was, say, less than half the median income—the income of the household at the center of the income-distribution curve. In 2004, the median pre-tax household income was $44,684; a poverty line based on relative deprivation would have been $22,342. (As under the current system, adjustments could be made for different family sizes.)

Adopting a relative-poverty threshold would put to rest the debate over how to define a subsistence threshold. As long as the new measure captured those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, it wouldn't matter much whether the income cutoff was set at forty per cent or fifty per cent of median income. If poverty is a relative phenomenon, what needs monitoring is how poor families make out compared with everybody else, not their absolute living standards.

Academics have proposed a relative-poverty line before; notably, the British sociologist Peter Townsend, in 1962, and the American economist Victor Fuchs, who is now an emeritus professor at Stanford, in 1965. Nobody has taken the idea very seriously. "I still think that it is the right way to think about poverty, especially from a policy point of view," Fuchs told me. Unfortunately, few politicians and poverty experts agree. Liberals fear that shifting the focus of policy away from hunger and physical need would make it even harder to win support for government anti-poverty programs; conservatives fear that adopting a relative-poverty rate would be tantamount to launching another costly war on poverty that the government couldn't hope to win.

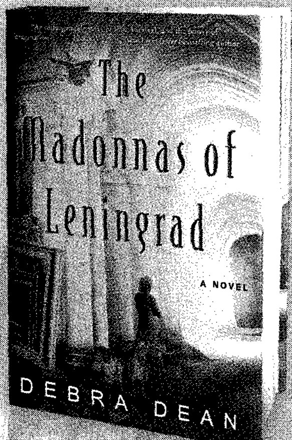
Neither of these fears is justified. Many Americans are skeptical about government anti-poverty programs, because they believe that the impoverished bear some responsibility for their plight by dropping out of high school, taking drugs, or committing crimes. Raising public awareness about relative deprivation could help to change attitudes toward the poor, by showing how those at the bottom of the social hierarchy continue to face obstacles even as they, along with the rest of the society, become more prosperous. The *Times* recently reported that more than half of black men in inner cities fail to finish high school, and that, nationwide, almost three-quarters of black male high-school dropouts in their twenties are unemployed. "It doesn't do a poor person any good to say 'You are better off than you would have been thirty years ago,'" Fuchs said. "The pathologies we associate with poverty—crime, drug use, family disintegration—we haven't eliminated them at all."

The conservative case against a relative-poverty line asserts that since some people will always earn less than others the relative-poverty rate will never go down. Fortunately, this isn't necessarily true. If incomes were distributed more equally, fewer families would earn less than half the median income. Therefore, the way to reduce relative poverty is to reduce income inequality—perhaps by increasing the minimum wage and raising taxes on the rich. Between 1979 and 2000, the inflation-adjusted earnings of the poorest fifth of Americans increased just nine per cent; the earnings of the middle fifth rose fifteen per cent; and the earnings of the top fifth climbed sixty-eight per cent.

In the Ninth Ward and in neighborhoods like it, the gap between aspiration and reality has never been greater. As Americans were shocked to learn, many residents lacked the means to pay for transportation out of the city during Hurricane Katrina. But the poor of New Orleans were also relatively deprived, as became clear when they were transported to Houston and other cities and, in some cases, ended up staying with affluent white families. (Not surprisingly, conflict ensued. In Houston's public high schools, Katrina evacuees have been involved in brawls.) The entire episode demonstrated that those at the bottom of the social pecking order are not only economically detached from other Americans; they are also socially and geographically isolated.

Introducing a relative-poverty line would help shift attention to this larger problem of social exclusion. Although few attempts have been made to address the issue, the results have been promising. A recent long-term study of Head Start, which began in 1964, as one of the original "war on poverty" initiatives, found that poor children who participated in the program were more likely to finish high school and less likely to be arrested for committing crimes than those who did not. And in another initiative, undertaken between 1976 and 1998, the city of Chicago relocated thousands of impoverished African-Americans from inner-city projects to subsidized housing in middle-class, predominantly white suburbs; researchers found that the adults who participated were more likely to be employed, and their children were more likely to graduate from high school, than their inner-city counterparts. (A more recent experiment, in which the federal government gave vouchers to poor residents in a number of cities, enabling them to move to wealthier neighborhoods, has failed to produce similar gains. Many of the participants chose to live near one another, which researchers think may account for the disappointing results.)

Mollie Orshansky, who is now ninety-one and living on Manhattan's East Side, never warmed to the idea of a relative-poverty line—she was too concerned about people actually starving—but she wasn't wedded to her method, either. "If someone has a better approach, fine," she said in 1999. "I was working with what I had and with what I knew." ♦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CITIZEN PENN

The many missions of Sean Penn.

BY JOHN LAHR

In San Francisco one day last June, at 7:45 A.M., an hour when even the panhandlers on Geary Street were still asleep, Sean Penn was standing in front of me, in sneakers, gray chinos, and denim work shirt, the quiff of his full brown hair catching glints of sun, alert and ready to go. "I'm not so much an early riser as a non-sleeper," he said, peering over the top of his sunglasses. The day before, Penn had flown back from Tehran—where, as a correspondent for the San Francisco *Chronicle*, he had been covering the run-up to the Iranian elections—in order to attend the junior-high-school graduation of his fourteen-year-old daughter, Dylan. This morning, he had dropped his twelve-year-old son, Hopper, at school. Now we headed off to Union Square, for some of Sears Fine Food's Swedish pancakes.

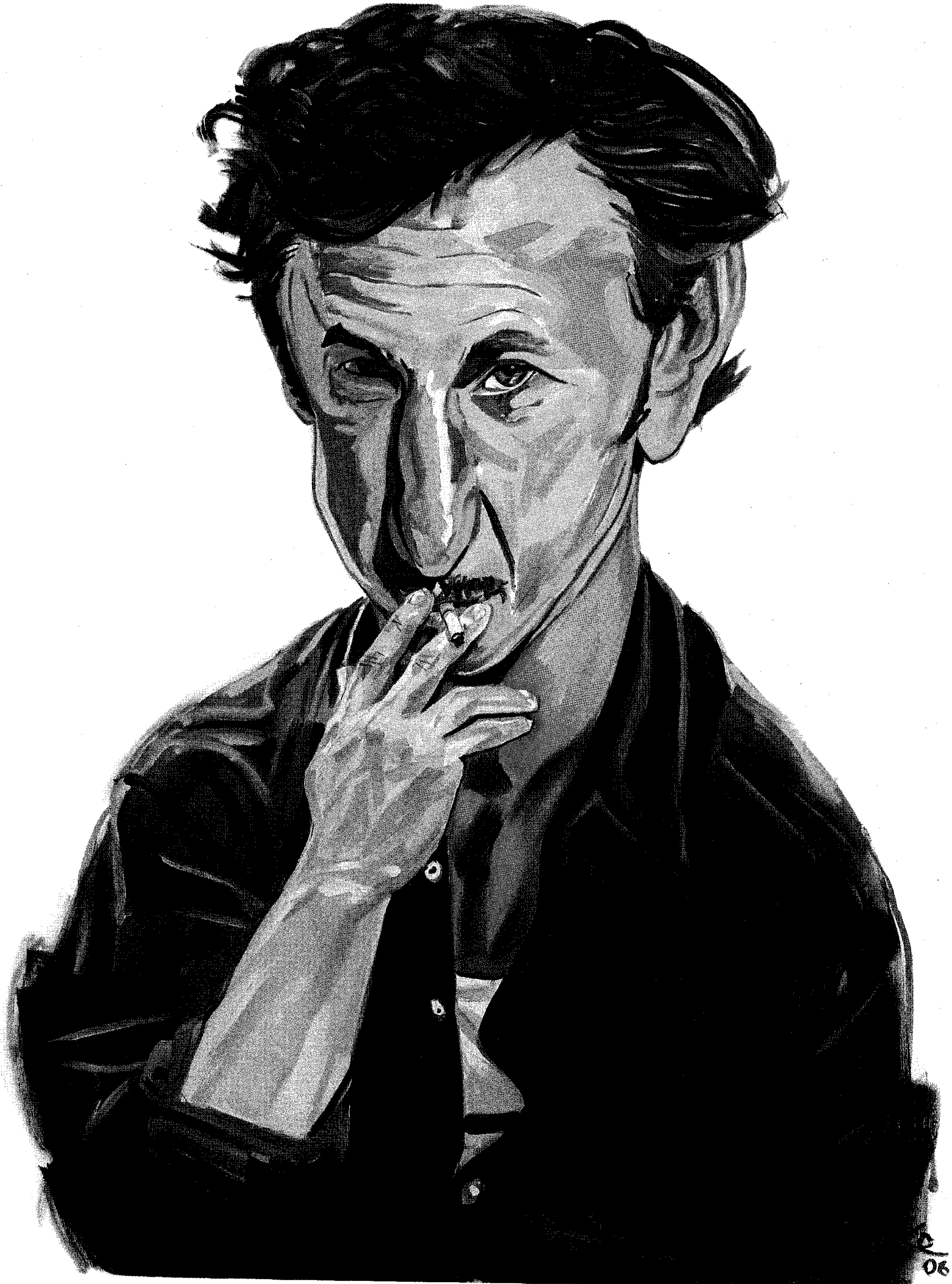
Penn, who is forty-five and a compact five feet eight, is at ease in his body. There is nothing hunched or furtive in his bearing—he emanates what in earlier times would have been called "backbone." "The feeling you get about him is that you can't call his bluff, because he's not bluffing," Woody Allen said about Penn, who starred in his 1999 film "Sweet and Lowdown." At the same time, Penn has a very specific gravity: reserve is part of his strength and his seduction. He is warm but no hail-fellow, polite but without that come-hither thing. "You see me from ten feet away, everyone thinks I'm gonna bite or something," Penn said. On first meeting, he gave no semaphore of greeting—no handshake, no smile, no small talk. His presence was his hello.

Over breakfast, he handed me an Iranian candy. He was preparing to write an article about his trip. (The piece, which was twelve thousand words, ran in the *Chronicle* in five installments in August.) He had a tantalizing array of incidents from which to draw: he had attended prayers at a Tehran mosque, a women's-rights demonstration, meetings with dissidents, a photo op with former President (and then Presidential candidate) Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and, perhaps inevitably, an award ceremony for his acting, at the Film Museum of Iran. On his travels, he told me, he had been "very aware of the ugly American," particularly in the reportorial ranks. "There's a consistent insensitivity," he said. "I watched journalists. They could only ever be seen by their subject as the person with a deadline. It's 'breaking news,' literally. By the time you get the news, you've broken it. You don't get a chance to investigate stories. These journalists live half the time in the Internet café, filing a story." Penn described his own form of reportage as "tournalism." "It's not an obligation of the tourist to observe experience so much as to have it," he said. "For me, a greater accuracy of perception comes out of that."

A veteran of some thirty-five films, Penn is renowned, in the acting profession, for the meticulousness of his research. "Sean is a guy who doesn't want to analyze a character too much," Alejandro González Iñárritu, who directed Penn in "21 Grams" (2003), has said. "He wants to be *as* the character." For his portrait of the stoned surfer Jeff Spicoli, in "Fast Times at Ridgemont High" (1982)—the role that made him famous, at the age of twenty-two—Penn lived out of his car at the beach; to play a cop, in "Colors" (1988), he apprenticed to an L.A.P.D. officer; for the role of Emmet Ray, "the world's second-greatest guitar player," in "Sweet and Lowdown," he studied guitar fingering. In his forays into politics and journalism, Penn relies on the same strategy. "Sean's an investigative reporter of his emotional life and our world," Dennis Hopper, who directed Penn in "Colors," told me. "Sean goes to the middle of the hurricane. He's not taking a secondhand opinion. He really wants to know what's going down." In 1992, during the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles, Penn drove into the thick of the pandemonium and got a shopping cart thrown through his windshield for his curiosity. In 2002 and 2003, he travelled to Iraq (once before the American-led invasion and once afterward), in order to observe life there—and, on the second visit, to write about it for the *Chronicle*. "My trip is to personally record the human face of the Iraqi people so that their blood—along with that of American soldiers—would not be invisible on my own hands," he said at a Baghdad press conference in 2002. In Penn's opinion, his shift from actor to correspondent was "seamless." "You wake up in the morning with an interest in listening and expressing," he said. "It all feels the same to me. Acting is Everyman-ness, and loving Everyman. Finally, you're reaching out to people's pain."

Because of his activism, Penn is often caricatured as a showboating celebrity liberal. "It's as if Ernest Hemingway made sweet, sweet love to Jeff Spicoli before our very eyes," the media blog Gawker said when the second installment of the Iran piece came out. In "Team America: World Police," Trey Parker and Matt Stone's 2004 marionette film parody of Bush's war on terror, a bubbleheaded Penn puppet says of Iraq, "Before Team America showed up it was a happy place. They had flowing meadows, and rainbow skies, and rivers made of chocolate where the children danced and laughed and played with gumdrop smiles." Penn shot back a "sincere fuck you" to the filmmakers, in a letter that was reprinted on the Drudge Report; he also offered to retrace his steps with them. "We'll fly to Amman, Jordan, and I'll ride with you . . . twelve hours through the Sunni Triangle into

PHILIP BURKE



Penn's angry bravado is the key to his appeal. Woody Allen says, "Women want to take care of him and men find him heroic."

Fallujah and Baghdad and I'll show you around," he wrote. "When we return, make all the fun you want."

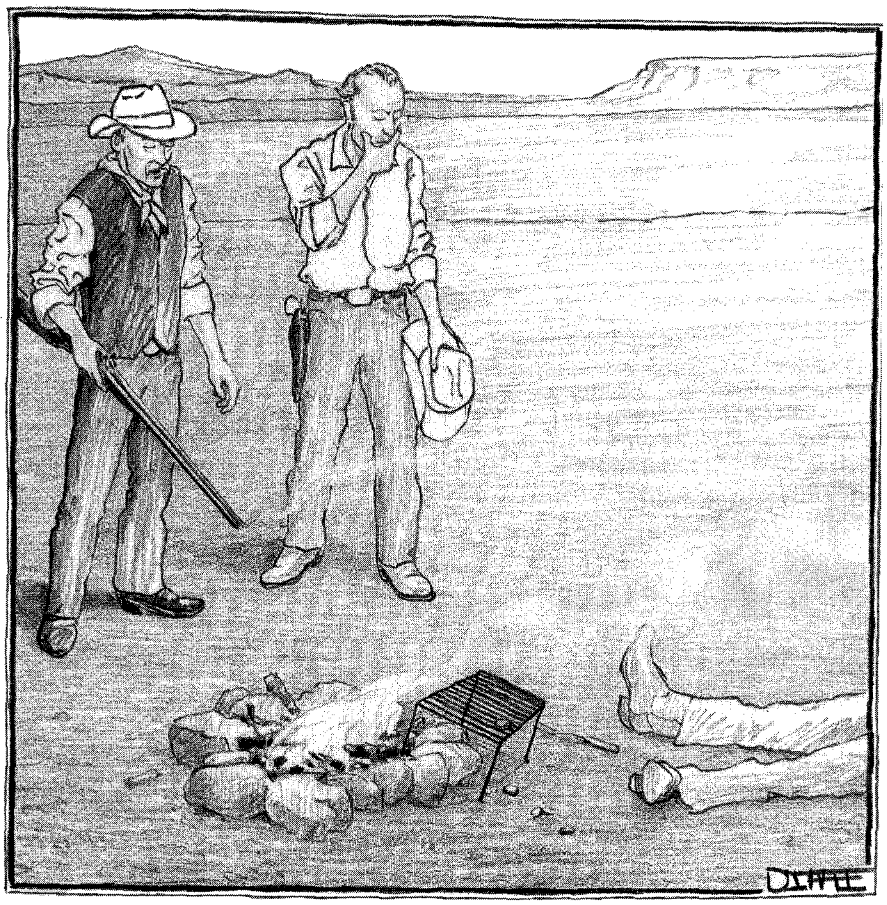
Early in 2005, Penn completed filming for Steven Zaillian's remake of "All the King's Men," which will open later this year, and in which he plays the mesmerizing and corrupt Louisiana kingpin Willie Stark, Robert Penn Warren's fictional version of Huey Long. His plan now, he told me, was to take a couple of years off from acting. (This wouldn't be the first time that he had taken a break from performing. In the nineties, he quit for a few years, and threw himself into directing instead.) "I'm out of fuel," he said, adding, "You want to be aware of the impact in terms of just how much you put out there. You want to maintain the potency of aspects of yourself—marshal your forces, select things you can put your heart and soul into. Have time to evolve and re-inform the creature who's doing it." He said that he sometimes has difficulty sustaining his passion over the hard slog of a film shoot. "You turn on the news, and there's something else you want to make a movie about," he said. On the other hand, he added, "if there's anything really valuable for me in the craft of acting, it's maintaining the skills to hold on to the passion I started with." Acting, he explained, was like parachuting. "If you jump out of an airplane, you love the first thousand feet. Now you're ready to land, but you're not gonna slow down just because you aren't interested anymore. The craft is there to make sure that when you jump you're propelled properly to keep going full speed."

Penn is an entrepreneur of his own edge—a roiling combination of rage, buoyancy, tenderness, and hurt. His struggle to contain this combustible emotional package makes him at once dangerous and exciting. In his art and in his life, he takes chances. ("Sean is batty as a loon and is prone to taking extraordinary risks in foreign towns," the late Hunter S. Thompson, who knew something about recklessness, wrote.) He has been known to hand out to friends cards on which he has printed the epigraph to William Saroyan's "The Time of Your Life": "In the time of your life live," it begins, "so that in that good time there shall be no ugliness or death for yourself or for any life your life touches." Penn has the confidence of a man who believes that the world will provide what he needs when he needs it. "It's trusting your instincts and your experience," he says. "Call it fate."

He is also a fighter. In his gun-toting, paparazzi-punching, midnight-rambling Hollywood years, which spanned the eighties and early nineties, he took regular pleasure in publicly biting the hands that fed him. "What's the difference between yogurt and Los Angeles?" he liked to joke to the press back then. "Yogurt has a living culture." But after Penn's wife, the actress Robin Wright Penn, was carjacked in the driveway of their Santa Monica home, with their two young children still in the car (no one was hurt), in 1996, the Penn ménage decamped for the picturesque tranquillity of the Bay Area, to a tidy patch of suburban normality about forty-five minutes north of San Francisco, where they live now in a tile-and-stucco hacienda, surrounded by a large wall that Penn constructed.

Penn likes driving. He's been known to take long, freewheeling car trips around America, especially after a film has wrapped and he gets that "*big* fucken school's-out-for-summer feeling," he told Richard T. Kelly, who published the fascinating oral history "Sean Penn: His Life and Times" last year. "Give me a car and a country I can zigzag through . . . and I'm a bird," he said. Even on the short trip back to his house after breakfast, he seemed to enjoy the glamour of himself in motion. He leaned forward over the steering wheel of his black S.U.V., cupping his hands around his lighter as he lit a Marlboro. I remarked that he seemed like the kind of person who would roll his own cigarettes. "Oh, no, then I'd be a real smoker," he said. "These give me the illusion that I can quit."

With the cigarette dangling raffishly from the side of his mouth, he was a snapshot of casual, at least until he spotted a police car in his rearview mirror. "I always think it's me. 'Para-fucking-noia, Eddie,' " he said, quoting a line from David Rabe's "Hurlyburly." (Penn appeared in the Los Angeles première of



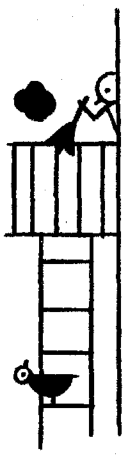
"I had to do it, Jeb. He was grilling zucchini."

the play, in 1988, and also in the 1998 film version.) He fumbled through the glove compartment. "I have a driver's license," he said, "but I don't have it on me."

Penn has had his share of run-ins with the police. In Macao in 1986, during the shooting of "Shanghai Surprise," he was arrested for helping to deter an intruding paparazzo by hanging him by his ankles from the ninth-floor balcony of his hotel room. (Penn subsequently broke out of the jail where he was being held on charges of attempted murder and escaped from the country by jetfoil.) In 1987, he served thirty-three days of a sixty-day sentence in the Los Angeles County jail (twenty-three hours a day in solitary) for violating the probation he'd been given for punching a fan who tried to get too close to his first wife, Madonna. In 1988, Madonna herself summoned a SWAT team to the couple's house in Malibu, after the two had fought. ("She developed a concern that if she were to return to the house she would get a very severe haircut," Penn, who was not arrested in the well-publicized incident, said later.)

For a mile or so, Penn kept careful watch on the police car behind us while he chatted about his children—Dylan's transfer to a private school, Hopper's skateboarding obsession. Then the police car swung into the express lane and pulled up alongside us, and the officer driving it motioned in Penn's direction. At first, it seemed that she was signalling Penn to pull over, but she was only pointing at his seat belt. Penn strapped himself in. The police car sped away. "That's nice," Penn said. He turned to me and allowed himself a smile.

Penn's office space—two capacious rooms built above the garage of his house—has its own entrance, with a doormat that reads "Witness Protection Program." He refers to it as his "after-hours editorial facility"; a "bunker" is what his close friend the musician David Baerwald calls it. This is where Penn comes to write, edit, drink, carouse, and wheel and deal. It is also a visible manifestation of Penn's guarded nature. The rooms—decorated in a sort of bordello burgundy, with burgundy velvet wallpaper, burgundy baize on the pool and poker tables, and burgundy chairs—have a crepuscular gloom; they reflect the "downtown quality" that Jack Nicholson has said expresses "the dark part of Sean's character . . . this feeling for lost souls and the kind of green-tinted late-at-night quality." Penn, of course, has a wide range of well-placed friends, but he seems to be happiest in the company of what Baerwald calls "the demi-demimonde—the kind of people who might follow Al Capone around." In this demotic scrum—"I'm just another American who appreciates a little color," Penn once wrote—he feels safe. "I hang out with guys who are very comfortable not looking at me and not having me look back at them," Penn told *Playboy* in 1991. "It's like being by yourself without being by yourself."



"You have to protect your edges," Dennis Hopper said, explaining why Penn keeps much of the world at arm's length. "James Dean said to me when I was young, 'The giant sequoia tree in its beginning is very small inside but the bark is very large. The bark is a foot thick but doesn't get bigger. The bark is there to allow the inside to grow. An actor is like that.' Every time you do an emotional scene, you're exposing yourself. The second the scene's over, you have to shut it back down and put your bark back on. If you walk around without it, you're just a wounded tree—you're going to die, because there's just too much stuff coming into you. Sean goes deep into his emotional inner life. He allows you to see it, then he closes it back up. He has to, or he wouldn't be able to survive." Woody Allen agreed. "He's not easily accessible," he said. "It's hard to get through to him, and you feel that at any minute he could blow up at you. It makes it so interesting. Women want to take care of him and men find him heroic."

Penn's elusiveness was established at an early age. Penn's mother, the actress Eileen Ryan Penn, told Richard Kelly that, as a child, "Sean had his own private little world going." "I don't think that I really spoke outside my home till I was five," Penn told me. "I remember plenty of conversations, but they were all with myself. If I ever felt loneliness, it was in a group." Penn's shyness, by his own admission, was also a kind of strategic retreat. "When I realized that people could not see into me—that bothered me," he said. "I wanted to be transparent, so as to be understood. I knew that my intentions were good. It seemed to me I could give a lot more and be more productive with people who could see who I was." He went on, "I didn't want to be charming. I didn't want to have to be funny. I didn't want to have to be flawless. I wanted to be able to know that my heart was in the right place and not do a big song and dance to display it." Penn's kindergarten teacher dubbed him "Gary Cooper." "The only complaint that teachers ever gave me about him was 'Is he happy?' " Eileen Penn said. "He seemed to be so quiet."

In high school, Penn learned that his unreachable quality could be used to both provoke and seduce. "Being shy brings attention—it brings my subjects to me," he explained. "It works the same way it did on the quad in high school. There's a lot of noise, a lot of alpha dogs plying their trade. Then, there's you, bouncing your tennis shoes off the brick on the planter you're sitting on. At some point in the school year, a pretty girl reaches a moment of reflection where that becomes more attractive than the alpha dog. You've got a lot of stuff that will be new to share."

Onscreen, Penn parses his own solitude. Almost all the characters to whom he has been drawn are to some degree cut off from the world, whether by murderous obsession (Samuel J. Byck, in "The Assassination of Richard Nixon"; Sergeant Tony Meserve, in "Casualties of War"; Matthew Poncelet, in "Dead Man Walking"; Jimmy Markum, in "Mystic River"), by mental or physical damage (Sam Dawson, in "I Am Sam"; Eddie Quinn, in "She's So Lovely"; Paul Rivers, in "21 Grams"), by drugs (Eddie, in "Hurlyburly," Spicoli, in "Fast Times at Ridgemont High"), or by artistic self-absorption (Emmet, in "Sweet and Lowdown"). But the fury that fuels Penn's performances—"the wonderful homicidal quality of his rage," as the screenwriter Nick Kazan describes it—is examined in even greater depth in the three films that he has directed (he also wrote the first two): "The Indian Runner" (1991), "The Crossing Guard" (1995), and "The

Pledge" (2001). On the surface, Penn's well-told tales seem disparate. However, the issue at stake is almost always his own: the desire both to connect with and to elude people—to be, in other words, a kind of respectable outlaw. Penn addressed this division most directly in "The Indian Runner," which was inspired by Bruce Springsteen's song "Highway Patrolman." The film tells the story of two brothers, one a dutiful family-loving deputy sheriff, the other a violent, unreachable jailbird. "I think both things exist in me," Penn said, adding, "If we're of any use, then we have blood on our hands." The film takes its title and its central visual trope from a game of hide-and-seek that the brothers play as kids in the cornfields. "I'm the Indian runner. I'm a message, and the message is 'Bet you can't find me,'" the wayward Frank tells his older brother, Joe, as their chase begins. The tale ends in a standoff; Frank is gone and Joe has given up the chase. The short-film director Matt Palmieri, who has been a close friend of Penn's since elementary school, agreed that the characters represent the two sides of Sean. "One part of him is the responsible, clearheaded, thoughtful older brother, the guy who kind of takes charge in a crisis," he said. "But, on the other hand, he's angry, wild, rambunctious—definitely highly aggressive."

As Penn and I talked in his office, he noticed me glancing at a plastic Barbie-like doll propped against the fireplace. "An Ann Coulter doll," he explained, referring to the neo-conservative TV pundit. "We violate her," he said. "There are cigarette burns in some funny areas. She's pure snake-oil salesman. She doesn't believe a word she says. She mentions Leo in her book 'Treason.'"

Leo Penn, Sean's father, was a movie actor, whose career was blighted in the early fifties by the Hollywood blacklist. (He died, of lung cancer, in 1998.) According to Penn, Leo was "the king of comfort in his own skin." (He was buried in his iconic mufti: sandals, Hawaiian shirt, and baseball cap.) Every Father's Day, Penn shows his children ten minutes of a video of Leo, made two years before his death, in which he recounts his eventful life to a group called Women in Film. Penn cued up the film for me, and Leo and his gentle charm filled the room:

> When I was eleven, my mother—who was maybe four foot ten—and I occupied the back seat of a Greyhound bus and drove to California nonstop, where my father had been for a year, squeezing oranges to make a living. And I'll never forget that trip. That had a large impact on my life because it was so joyous. And this was during the Depression, when the gap between rich and poor was not what it is now. We were all in the same boat, and we all had a blast on that Greyhound bus: people playing guitars and singing songs and relating to one another. . . .
>
> I went to war. I was away four years. While I was here—came back on I guess it was overseas leave—I was invited to do a play at U.C.L.A. . . . It went very well, and suddenly I was getting phone calls—and I was still in the service. I was getting calls from agents. I thought, Jesus, is it possible to turn this into a profession. . . . I did a screen test. To my amazement they put me under contract. . . . Life was very rosy for a while. . . . I worked in the theatre; for some of the time I had a soap opera on radio. . . . Then I was under contract to a B-movie company called Monogram. I did one picture. They didn't like my [last] name, and I refused to change it. . . . I changed my first name to Clifford 'cause I liked Clifford Odets. They didn't like Clifford 'cause they said he was a Communist.

Although Leo was not named in the House Un-American Activities Committee investigations, his progressive leanings, his refusal to testify, and his support of the Hollywood Ten got him labelled as a fellow-traveller. By 1952, he couldn't work on the West Coast. He moved back East, where, he said, "it took roughly two years and I was dead in New York, too. I couldn't do either film or television." Nonetheless, Leo built up a considerable reputation as a theatre actor; in 1957, he replaced Jason Robards in the legendary Circle in the Square production of "The Iceman Cometh." He soon fell in love with a beautiful, outspoken actress in the company, Eileen Ryan, and they married in 1958.

The Penns were socially conscious, resilient survivors. "We didn't have the money to get me out of the hospital when Michael was born," Eileen Ryan Penn said of her first son's birth, in 1958. "We laughed a lot about it." The Penns moved to California, and settled in the San Fernando Valley, in 1959. When Leo was offered the chance to try his hand at directing for television, he accepted. He loved the camaraderie of the job, and he was good at it; over the next thirty years, he directed more than four hundred hours of prime-time TV, winning an Emmy in 1973 for a special episode of "Columbo." But there were times when Sean heard in his father's badinage a hint of disappointment: "I'd say, 'What are you up to?' He'd say, 'Ah, you know, trying to make a better piece of shit out of a worse piece of shit.'"

Leo had been betrayed by the country that he'd fought for with distinction. As a bombardier in the Second World War, at a time when a pilot's life expectancy was around fifteen missions, Leo had flown thirty-one, including three over Berlin, and won the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal. "He had about ten years of hard-core flashbacks and sleeplessness," Penn has said. "As a tail gunner, you saw the face of your enemy. You saw the devastation of the rounds at the end of your gun. That was a big thing for him." Many of the hallmarks of Sean's artistic career—his fascination with outsiders, his rebelliousness, his hatred of injustice, his suspicion of authority, his flirtation with heroics—are informed by the legends of Leo's life, of both his military and his political travails. "One thing that the children of blacklisted people know is that on many levels acceptable polite society is just another fraud," Baerwald said. "Leo should have, could have, and certainly wanted to do work of more substance than he did. Life was much diminished."

Nowadays, when Penn invokes his father's memory, he recalls the smile in his eyes. "He could have very strong opinions and see all sides of an issue at the same time, but there was always that sparkle thing," he told me. Leo's work, however, usually took him away from home at dawn and brought him back after dinner. "He was a good weekend father," Penn said. "Once Dad got home, it became about the couple. Basically, that was their time. Our family time was the weekend." When Penn was a child, his parents' bond was complicated but palpable. "We adored each other," Eileen has said. "We had a great marriage. We were never bored with each other. We grew together." Penn remembers his mother and father sitting late at night on their patio in Malibu, looking out at the Pacific. "If you sneaked out for a snack or something,

"I have my pants put on one leg at a time."

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they'd just be sitting there, lights out," he told Kelly. "She'd be sound asleep with her head on his lap, and he would be rubbing her hair. And that was very common—nearly every night."

As we were driving, Penn returned to that memory, but with an additional detail: "He'd drink a bottle of J&B at night; my mother'd polish off a bottle of Smirnoff. She never started drinking till we were in bed. They could both get up early the next morning and function." Penn recalled a night when he was a teen-ager and he and his brother Michael sneaked home late. He turned off the engine of his beat-up Mazda at the foot of the driveway and they pushed it thirty yards, to where the family house was nestled beside a coral tree. As they crept up, they could see their parents on the patio in their usual entwined position. "My mother had fallen asleep—call that 'passed out,' " Penn said. "My dad had taken the ship's wheel off the wall." (Leo had a fascination with the sea, and the house was decorated with boating paraphernalia.) "He had my mom's head in his lap. Above her head was the ship's wheel. My brother said, 'Dad's steering the house!' " Eileen Penn told me, "Leo and I drank equally. We enjoyed the drinks. I'm not sorry. If I was like my mother—falling down the cellar steps, me coming home from school with a friend and she'd be half hanging out of her nightgown . . . Sean never experienced any of that with me." But Sean's younger brother, Chris, also an actor, who died accidentally, after taking a combination of prescription and over-the-counter medications, last January, at the age of forty, saw a difference between his father's attitude toward alcohol and his mother's. "I think my father was a hard drinker," he told me last year. "I don't think he was an alcoholic." And his mother? "I won't go into it," he said.

Eileen Penn is of Irish and Italian descent, and she has a particularly volatile intensity. After obtaining a bachelor-of-science degree from New York University to please her parents—her mother was a nurse—she followed her own dream by going to New Orleans to sing in a bar, then becoming a successful actress Off Broadway. She gave up performing when she had children. "All the passion I had for acting went into being a mother," she has said. She wanted only sons. When Michael was being born, she yelled at the nurse, "If it's a girl, push it back in! I'm not going through twenty-four hours of labor for any woman!" She explained, "My father was so protective, so worried if I ever did something that he thought was dangerous. So I just wanted boys who could go out there and do anything they wanted in the world."

On the way to his house, Penn had suddenly pulled the car off onto a slip road and switchbacked down to a spot below the Golden Gate Bridge so that he could show me where the breakers were sometimes large enough for surfing. "I don't know this break well, so I don't know the times of the year that it shoots up," he said. "I've actually seen it come through these piers when it was a real crazy squall."

When Penn was nine, in 1969, his family moved from the Valley to a ramshackle fifty-seven-thousand-dollar beach house with a view of the ocean, near Point Dume, in Malibu. Today, the plot is worth millions, and Barbra Streisand lives at the end of the road. Back then, the community was almost rural, and Penn loved it. "The newness of the world. The smell of the creeks. That stuff did not get old to me. I can still smell Point Dume, 1969," he said.

He surfed throughout his teen-age years, and the sport has had a lasting

CASSANDRA, IRAQ

1.
She's magnificent, as we imagine women must be
who foresee and foretell and are right and disdained.

This is the difference between we who are like her
in having been right and disdained, and we as we are.

Because we, in our foreseeings, our having been right,
are repulsive to ourselves, fat and immobile, like toads.

Not toads in the garden, who after all are what they are,
but toads in the tale of death in the desert of sludge.

2.
In this tale of lies, of treachery, of superfluous dead,
were there ever so many who were right and disdained?

With no notion of what to do next? If we were true seers,
as prescient as she, as frenzied, we'd know what to do next.

influence on him. "I defined surfing then as an art form," he said in 1991. "It was truly about matching the energy of the wave. It was a harmony, and there was poetry to it. There was a spiritual aspect to surfing." At the age of eleven, Penn signed up for the gruelling regimen of Junior Lifeguards, which included a sixty-eight-buoy early-morning ocean swim. ("He always put himself through tough stuff: very stoic like that," Eileen has said. "He can take a lot of discomfort." "I liked it," she told me of his grit.) An article published in the magazine *Surfer* by the former pro surfer Alf Laws, who oversaw Penn's training, became a kind of inspirational text for him. "I've thought about it thousands of times, it was about being able to adjust, how to apply yourself," he said. Laws wrote, "One must possess two important qualities: confidence and go-for-it attitude. In aggressive surfing, one must believe in himself and his ability to make it through any situation. No hesitating allowed, boy, punch it! Tune yourself to the energy the waves are creating, and create some tracks of your own. You'll feel righteous." Surfing taught Penn both the pursuit of excellence and the habit of bravery. According to his former fiancée Elizabeth McGovern, who was his co-star in "Racing with the Moon" (1984), it "was a sort of parable for his whole life. He's always riding the crest."

"We were roaming kids," Chris Penn, who also surfed, rode horses, and sometimes slept overnight on the beach, told me. "We had a lot of freedom." Sean said, "From the time we were very young, it was all about expanding your imagination." Eileen's gospel, according to her, "wasn't 'Aim high'; it was 'Aim *out*—to life.' " She set her children a feisty example. "She was a lioness," Penn said. "Boy, she could dress down those authority figures. She was unintimidatable." She was also tough to the point of scathing. "She was a grinding wheel," Baerwald said. "I mean, to make a knife, you've got to have a hard surface." He added, "I get the feeling she was really, really, really, really, really, really rough on Sean." After high school, Penn apprenticed at the Group Repertory Theatre, a ninety-nine-seat house in North Hollywood. He described his mother's visit to his début performance: "I played a part in a stage version of 'The Young Savages.' My mom comes backstage. She took my face in her hands. She looked me in the eye, and she said, 'You were just terrible. You cannot do this.' Meaning acting. That's my mom." Penn added, "About a hundred per cent of my friends were definitely afraid of her."

"He had to fight me growing up," Eileen said. Penn emerged from the battle with an unusual carapace of ferocity, charm, and strength. "When I was a young man, she was a greater source of confidence than my father," Penn said. She was also the template on which Penn based what he calls his "unyielding attention to what we would perceive as injustice." To the suggestion that his mother was a kind of fanatic, Penn answered, "I would say that lovingly, but I do confirm it as such." "There were times when being dramatic was needed," she said. "I needed to get it out. I wasn't always perfectly in control. I just blasted away." Eileen was fiercer with Sean than with her other sons because, as she said, "he was more like me." He certainly had her forthrightness—"He's nobody's candidate for Secretary of State; he's not very diplomatic," Baerwald said—and her appetite for conflict.

"Anger feeds my brain," Eileen said. "If you're justified in it, it's exciting. It makes me feel alive—a good fight. It was the only problem I ever had with Leo. I couldn't get him mad. I couldn't get a fight when I wanted one. Maybe that's why I fought with Sean." Chris, who was five years younger than Sean, spoke of his brother's "turbulent" adolescent relations with their mother as "a very hurtful time for me because I loved them both." One time, when Sean was particularly cruel to his mother, Chris remembered, "I basically told him to leave the house, after throwing him around the kitchen, smashing his head against the wall. It wasn't a kid's fight. It was a real fight." Of Sean's tendency to close himself off, Chris added, "I can tell you this: that unreachable thing kept me angry at him until my father got sick, in the late nineties. It was confounding. I don't think it was intentional. Now when he does it—he still does it, he always will—it doesn't bother me anymore." "I don't think Sean goes into depression," Eileen told me. "He creates pain in others so he can fix it. If it isn't there and it doesn't need to be fixed, he can't be the hero and fix it."

"I'm damaged," Penn told *Rolling Stone* in 1996. "I recognize that." Penn told me that he "still hadn't sorted out" the source of his rage. "A couple of girlfriends ultimatumed me into therapy things," he said. "I tried but it just didn't play." Baerwald told me, "The stuff he has shared with me indicates to me

We'd twitter, as she did, like birds; we'd warble, we'd trill.
But what would it be really, to *twitter*, to *warble*, to *trill*?

Is it *ee-ee-ee*, like having a child? Is it *uh-uh-uh*, like a wound?
Or is it inside, like a blow, silent to everyone but yourself?

3.
Yes, inside, I remember, *oh-oh-oh:* it's where grief
is just about to be spoken, but all at once can't be: *oh*.

When you no longer can "think" of what things like lies,
like superfluous dead, so many, might mean: *oh*.

Cassandra will be abducted at the end of her tale, and die.
Even she can't predict how. Stabbed? Shot? Blown to bits?

Her abductor dies, too, though, in a gush of gore, in a net.
That we know; she foresaw that—in a gush of gore, in a net.

—*C. K. Williams*

that he was a mighty, mighty confused teen-ager. I mean *might*-y. There's one way he could reach his parents—by becoming 'Sean Penn,' and fulfilling both their dreams." Chris agreed. "Once Sean got out and started acting, it changed," he said.

Acting allowed Penn to turn his turmoil to advantage; it also allowed him to live up to his mother's notion of his singularity. ("He was her protégé," Chris said. "She absolutely lived a lot of her career through Sean.") Once, as a child, Penn asked his mother if she loved him the same as Michael, who is now a musician and songwriter. "No," she said, "you're an original. There's only one Sean and only one Michael." Penn was obsessed with the Watergate hearings, and dreamed of becoming a lawyer, but he lacked the grades. By his senior year of high school, he was cutting classes and toting around a Snoopy lunch box full of film paraphernalia for Super 8 movies that he was making with Chris and friends like Charlie Sheen and Emilio Estevez. After a brief stint at Santa Monica Junior College, where he studied car maintenance and cinematography, Penn found himself drawn back to the theatre. "Acting is the only field I could find where it was all about not having a precedent," he said. "For better or worse, it was one that depended singularly on what was different about you." By then, Robert De Niro's performances had captured Penn's imagination. "He made excellence a moving thing," Penn said. "This wasn't a guy who was born with fireworks in his pocket. He didn't have a conventionally handsome face. He didn't have the melodic voice of Gregory Peck. He didn't even have an interest in having those things. He was a totally unique creature and spoke of his time." He added, "One knew how invested he was in what he did. It also struck a chord in me. I needed to do something one hundred per cent. I hungered for a process that would leave no stone unturned."

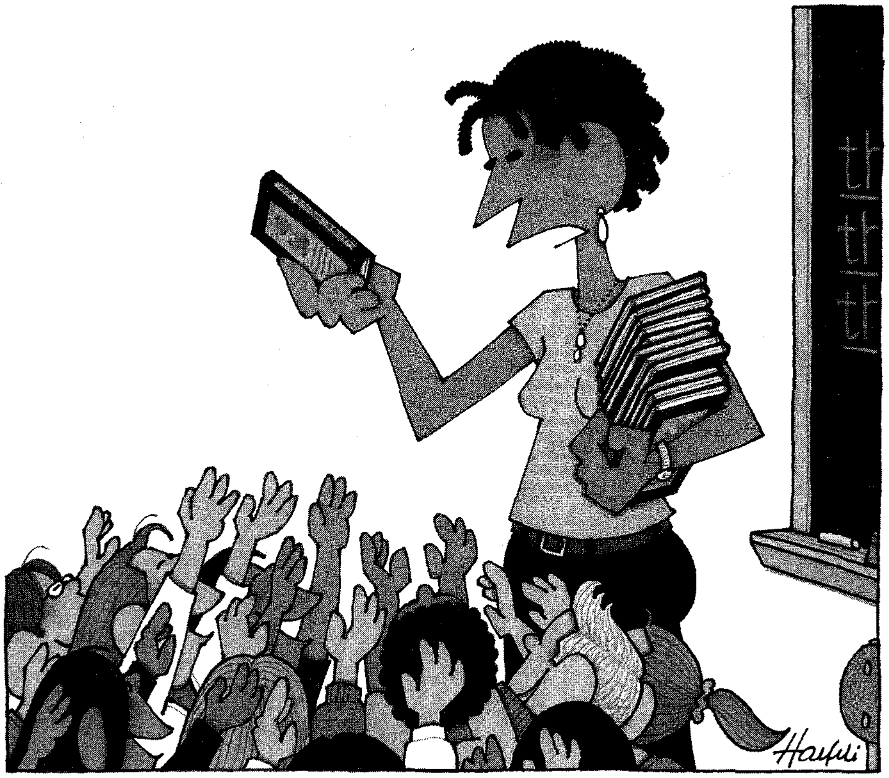
Penn recalled being backstage during his apprenticeship at the Group Repertory Theatre and watching a middle-aged actor get ready to go on. "He had a pretty good TV career going," he said. "I had seen him in a lot of things. He didn't have to be at this theatre, for zero money." Penn continued, "I watched him take off his cowboy boots to get into his costume; I followed his eyes down to the boots, and I said to myself, 'You know, I'll be O.K. at forty looking down at those boots, knowing that I'm going to do what he's going out to do tonight. I'll like this life. I know I'm good enough that I'll be an actor when I'm forty. Not a failed actor. Not a successful actor. I'll be an actor. It's an adventure.' "

At the outset of his career, according to Chris, Penn "didn't have a flamboyant or entertaining presence at all," but he "worked as hard as an Olympic athlete." "The thing Sean had was guts," Eileen has said. "The talent came later." From the age of eighteen to twenty, five hours a day, five days a week, Penn trained with the diminutive method-acting coach Peggy Feury, who counted among her clients Anjelica Huston, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Jeff Goldblum. Feury was "interested in how are you gonna bring yourself to the material rather than the material to you," Penn said. "I felt that Peggy was very personal with me. She'd teach you how to graph your work. I was wary of anything that was gonna fuck with my precious fucking instincts, but she just got to me. It was gentle, very gentle."

On his nineteenth birthday, Penn got his first professional part—on "Barnaby Jones"—and his Screen Actors Guild card. A year later, in 1980, he went East looking for work; almost immediately, he landed a part in a Broadway play, Kevin Heelan's "Heartland." When the play opened, the *Times* panned it as a "hackneyed melodrama," and said that Penn's character "mopes around the house like a sick gerbil." Still, the play marked a seismic shift in his life. "He said that for the first time he felt like himself," Baerwald recalled. "He could understand what being himself was." Two years later, he was cast in a cameo role in "Fast Times at Ridgemont High"; after the early rushes, his role was expanded into a star turn. Penn contributed his own surfing argot—"tubular," "gnarly," "awesome"—to the script; he also brought his own wardrobe to the set, including the black-and-white Vans that became a fashion statement for a generation. Art Linson, one of the film's producers, told Richard Kelly, "The famous scene where Spicoli comes late to class and Ray Walston rips up his card, and Sean says, 'You dick'—Ray Walston didn't know who Sean Penn was. So he says his line, 'I think you know where the principal's office is.' And Sean says, 'You *old, red-faced motherfucker* . . .' Ray Walston turned beet red and got crazy pissed-off, like 'How dare this kid?' " Linson continued, "But Sean, even then, was trying off-camera to get a rise out of him that would be great for the moment. That's a pretty audacious move for a kid who no one had heard of yet." "Fast Times" made Penn a renegade legend and won him instant membership in the fledgling Hollywood talentocracy known as the Brat Pack.

"Each time, Penn comes as a complete surprise," Pauline Kael wrote in her review for this magazine of the 1983 film "Bad Boys," in which Penn played a teen-ager in juvenile detention exacting revenge on another inmate. She explained, "He gets so far inside a role that he can make even a sociological confection such as this hero . . . someone an audience can care about." Penn often approached characters from the outside in, which was a bone of contention with his mother. When he was about to go on location as a drug dealer spying for the Soviet Union in the 1985 film "The Falcon and the Snowman," Penn told Eileen that he would be changing his hair and teeth for the role. "Just act the part," she said. "You don't need all that makeup." Later that day, Penn called her and invited her over to his house. When she got out of the car, a man came to greet her. "Hi, Mrs. Penn," he said. She vaguely recognized him, thinking "he was probably some friend of Sean's from school." " 'Remind me, I know you, I know you,' " she recalled saying. "And he's walking toward me. 'You're . . . Oh my God, you're my son.' " He was wearing the makeup he planned to use for the part. "Gotcha, Mom," he said.

But it wasn't until 1988, when he was playing Eddie, the coked-out Hollywood casting agent in "Hurlyburly," at the Westwood Playhouse, in L.A., that Penn achieved, in his eyes, a balance of discipline and expression. "Charlie Parker—or one of those guys—once said he played an A chord for half an hour before he heard it," he said. "I was playing the chords of this stuff for some years, and then, within the course of that play, I heard what it was I was trying to say and why I was trying to say it." At the intermission on opening night, the actor Robert Culp tapped Eileen on the shoulder. "You've got a Stradivarius," he said. The film version of "Hurlyburly" brought out all the emotional daring of Penn's technique. In it, he condensed the turbulence of his young adulthood into an almost visionary embodiment of Rabe's hilarious and horrible portrait of moral collapse. "Twenty years ago, it was internal combustion," Penn told me of his own life. "There wasn't anything that resembled peace in my spirit."



"I need you to line up by attention span."

In 1996, Penn and Wright, after six years together, followed by a fraught period of separation, were married (their children were five and two). The newfound maturity of his private life has been reflected in the range and depth of his screen performances as well. Over the last decade, his restraint has become more elegant, his reservoir of feeling more profound. The breakdown of the death-row killer Matthew Poncelet, in "Dead Man Walking" (1995), and Jimmy's grief-crazed fury over the murder of his daughter, in "Mystic River"—for which Penn won an Academy Award for Best Actor in 2003—are among the high-water marks of contemporary acting. Penn has drawn frequent comparisons to Marlon Brando, who was a friend of his. Brando, however, was never known for his light touch; Penn has one if he needs it. "I know I haven't shared as much joy—pure joy—and humor as I might experience in life," he said. "I'm predisposed to hold back." But, as he demonstrated in "Sweet and Lowdown," his reticence can be spice to comedy. "Sean can do lighter material," Woody Allen says. "He can deliver a line if he has to. He's just lucky that way."

Penn was driving me back to San Francisco when his cell phone rang. Wright needed the car by two. "So let's have dinner tonight," I said. Penn mumbled something about making a start on his *Chronicle* article. "I'll get back to you," he said.

At around five, the hotel phone rang. "Meet me at Tosca's at five-thirty," Penn said. He told me that he had made a dinner reservation at a Vietnamese place near Tosca's, a nondescript saloon in North Beach, which serves Penn variously as watering hole, mail drop, and clubhouse. When I walked into the dim glow of the bar, he wasn't there. I took a stool, ordered a beer, and settled down to watch the only two other people at the bar, who were going through the rituals of a first date. After fifteen minutes or so, I asked the bartender, "Sean been in?" "Yeah," he said. "He and the boss went out for dinner."

About half an hour later, Penn walked in with Jeanette Etheredge, Tosca's owner and den mother. "Everybody needs a bar in their life," Etheredge said; over the decades, hers has played a part in the carousing lives of Hunter S. Thompson, Francis Ford Coppola, Dennis Hopper, and William Kennedy, among others. Penn told Etheredge that he'd be back soon, and then, without mentioning that he'd already had dinner, he headed out with me to the Vietnamese restaurant. At Tower Valet Parking, Penn proffered some bills in the direction of the attendant. "Don't let him pay," another attendant shouted from across the lot, before persuading Penn to pose for a photo. As Penn finally approached his car, a tweedy middle-aged couple stood quietly on the sidewalk watching him. "We're just ogling," the woman said.

Over dinner, I repeated a story that his mother had told me, about talking to Woody Allen on the set of "Sweet and Lowdown." "Woody said he's always wanted to work with Sean but couldn't figure him out," Eileen had said. "I'll sum it up for you, Woody," she replied. "He's embarrassed at having had a happy childhood." Speaking of his mother earlier that day, Penn had said, "She has rewritten history quite a bit." (In Kelly's biography, for instance, Eileen claimed to have kept watch while her eleven-year-old son surfed. Penn categorically denied this. "At that age, the idea that your mother would stay at the beach to watch: impossible," he said. "It was a drop-off." He added, "Maybe she was taking too many chances with her kids. How did I survive?")

He was just about to comment on the story when his cell phone rang. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm on kid call." After he hung up the phone, Penn looked down at his half-eaten appetizer; the sight of food led him to a meditation on "the hunter-gatherer aspect of things." "Hunting isn't necessary in the world we're living in," he said. "A man can go and hunt elk if he wants. But the woman can get to the market sooner than that and bring home the food. So what's left? Violence. That's it. There's no identifiable venue for the system of alpha." The waiter took away our plates. Penn pushed himself back on the banquette. "I'm full," he said. "You want anything else?" I demurred. Penn called for the bill; he insisted on paying. It seemed that *I* was the venue for alpha.

Back at Tosca's, where the habitués were now three deep at the bar, arms were raised not to cheer on the Giants on the TV above the bar but to hold up cell-phone cameras as Penn made his sprightly progress to the back room. When he paused to talk to Etheredge at the end of the long bar, a young Asian man shoved a phone into his hand and asked him to speak to his father, who was celebrating his birthday. "Your son really should watch his drinking," Penn said into the phone. "Happy birthday."

The back room was as cramped and musty as a shebeen. The space was lit by a yellow neon sign that said "Tosca" and the green glow of a shaded bulb over the pool table, which kept the denizens crowded against the walls. Film posters haphazardly plastered to the walls added to the room's subterranean panache. Penn was at home. After he'd had a couple of vodka-and-tonics, his mood lightened and his guard lowered. At one point, talking about his friendship with the magician David Blaine, Penn leaned across the table and said, "Why are we close friends? I don't ask. I don't want to know. Love the mystery. Don't want to know why I'm here, per se, in life. Feel it, follow the feeling. But don't want the answer. Don't believe I'll get it. Don't want the safety net of 'Am I gonna have an afterlife or am I not?' " He continued, "Somebody says there's a God, I think it's a kind of funny notion. Somebody says there's not, I think it's a funny notion. To know is a funny notion. And so, you know, if I've got a religion, it's the mystery of the thing."

After a while, Penn led me upstairs to another dingy inner sanctum, where two off-duty policemen were sitting at a bare table, discussing the recent suicide of one of their cohorts. Penn knew the men and asked if they minded our presence. They waved us in. We settled into a plywood alcove. Penn reached into his pocket and pulled out a sheaf of typed pages. "First rough," he said, and in hushed tones he began to read:

> Jet lag had cut me down around midnight the day of my return from Tehran. But my fractured body clock sounded its alarm at 4:30 A.M., the following morning. I got up, went to the kitchen, flipped on the TV, and surfed my way through the channels, landing on CNN's "American Morning" with Soledad O'Brien. . . . She reported me to be currently in Tehran for the San Francisco *Chronicle*. . . . Then as footage of me from a well-meant farewell given me by the Iranian Film Society played, she observed that I looked to be playing a journalist. So here we begin, as I sit in my kitchen in northern California, she's reporting me to be in Tehran. She looks at the film given her by a producer and jumps on the bandwagon of attack. . . . Let's set the record straight, shall we? From the moment the international press became aware of my presence in Tehran, the predictable misreporting began deluging Web sites, newspapers, television, and radio in the United States and around the world. The inaccuracies ranged from claiming me a pro-Iranian, anti-American lefty, to a continuous and lazy presumption that my first and highly criticized trip to Iraq had been supported by the San Francisco *Chronicle*. . . . What's disturbing here goes to the heart of the misunderstandings throughout the world and to the heart of freedom. And the free press is only free when it is bold and accurate. And while the dismissive and trivial attacks on me may be the bickering of details, the number of dead and the purpose of war are not.

Penn read for about ten minutes, glancing up occasionally to see my reaction. After five pages, he was just about to disembark from the plane in Tehran. I suggested that perhaps he should get to Iran earlier in the piece. He nodded, but said nothing. (Stripped of some of its vainglory and verbosity, the edited version of Penn's essay became the *Chronicle's* most read story of the year, with more than half a million hits on the newspaper's Web site.)

Back downstairs, Penn made a beeline for Gavin Newsom, the mayor of San Francisco. He was soon in animated conversation with Newsom and his then wife, Kimberly Guilfoyle Newsom, a former lingerie model who was an anchor for Court TV. Penn, as the world knows, likes a good time; he is also expert at provoking one. When things get slow, according to Matt Palmieri, "he'll tell a joke, sing a song, recite a limerick. His most famous thing is to get up and say, 'Does anyone here want to see an interpretive dance?' Then he'll proceed to do a hilarious little dance." There was no dancing that night, but, toward the end of the evening, there was a song. Penn smiled, drink in hand, and leaned close to me as he intoned the lyrics to one of Baerwald's compositions:

Fifteen long years
on a losing streak
and a lot of bodies unburied
and there comes a time
when you cannot turn the other cheek
you have got to ride the ferry
past the battered old bodies
of dead dead dreamers
past the tethered and fettered and
desk-bound schemers
the punks and the drunks and the
bad guitar players and the dewy-eyed
teen-age dragon slayers . . .
ever hopeful and ever blue we
do the things that we know we have to do
and though we all know deep down in our hearts
that someday this will all fall apart
for right now, let's just be
heroes.

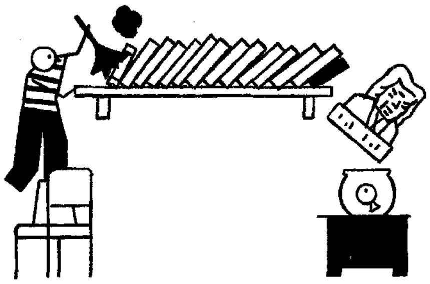
The next time I saw Penn, he *was* a hero. It was September, and he was on my television screen, wading chest deep in a New Orleans sump, trying to reach a survivor of Hurricane Katrina. Over the next forty-eight hours, I caught fleeting sight of Penn brandishing a rifle; lugging old people out of his boat; bailing out the boat; and, later, just off the plane to San Francisco, cleaned up and remarkably composed, being interviewed by Larry King. By then, although Penn had helped to rescue about forty people, the press and the bloggers had done their sneering. "Sean Penn, International Man of Action," it was reported, had come to New Orleans with his "entourage," including a photographer; the boat he was seen bailing out was widely reported to have sunk. None of this proved to be true. When King pressed him about the story of the sunken boat, Penn responded with a bet. If the newspaper that had first reported the sinking—the Melbourne *Herald Sun*—could produce any evidence of it, he'd pay out a million dollars; if it couldn't, it should pay a million toward disaster relief for the Katrina victims. The story went away, but, as I discovered a few days later in San Francisco, Penn's irritation did not.

In jeans and a black bomber jacket, Penn was sprawled barefoot on his office sofa when I arrived, around midday. Dazed and unshaven, he looked rough. Bottles of vodka and red wine were open on the coffee table beside him. Before we talked, he insisted that I read something he'd written for *Rolling Stone*. "Watching the scenes of devastation on my television set was like standing behind the tape line at a traffic accident and watching a child slowly bleed to death unattended," it began. "I'm not gonna tell you I wasn't very, very pissed off," he said about the press coverage of his rescue mission. "The whole reason I didn't go sooner was that I worried I'd be in the way. I was not in the way. Listen, most of the rescues were done by civilians." He added, "It's so disheartening that people are diabolically detached."

As the hurricane was unfolding, Penn, who had spent some time in New Orleans (and has "NOLA Deliver Me" tattooed on his right forearm to prove it), stayed in regular contact with the political pundit James Carville, who is also one of the executive producers of "All the King's Men," part of which was shot in New Orleans. At first, Penn was assured that everything that could be done was being done; then the Superdome lost its roof, and it became clear that the city was imploding. "Carville at a certain point said, 'Fuck it, do what you think,' " Penn said. He told his family he was going to the Astrodome in Houston and maybe to Baton Rouge. "I didn't tell them I was going to New Orleans. I didn't know I was gonna get in but I had a feeling." He also organized a small jet to fly to Baton Rouge with supplies: water, bug spray, athlete's-foot spray—"a lot of people who'd come out had wet feet"—Gatorade, Balance Bars.

As Penn told his story, he still seemed to be trying to make sense of the experience; words tumbled out of him in a sort of Cubist report of fractured time and vivid details: the prop plane he took from Houston to Baton Rouge; the police car that carried him into New Orleans; the surreal darkness of the city; the empty streets; finding a boat; the adrenaline, the bewilderment ("You kept thinking, like you did watching television, Any minute now the cavalry's coming"). A preacher called Willie from Noah's Ark church, who knew of forty kids trapped in a school, became the navigator on Penn's boat while Penn manned the bow, watching for submerged cars. It was a beautiful day; the water was black. Bloated bodies floated by—"all in the same position: face down, spread-eagled." People waded through water, foraging. "One guy had a big ham." Penn, who had been vaccinated for infectious diseases for an African safari earlier in the year, had no problem spending nine hours in the contaminated swamp. "I saw three non-civilian boats," he said. "What was surreal was the lack of presence of official people—the National Guard, the United States Army, the state, the New Orleans Police Department. There just weren't nearly enough of them."

Penn didn't stop to draw breath. He recalled a two-story building that had lost its entire front wall. "You were looking right into people's bedrooms," he said. "And, upstairs, in his boxer shorts, was this Middle Eastern guy with a shotgun and with Islamic symbols painted on the walls. He didn't want anything to do with us." Penn took a drag on his cigarette. He recalled a schizophrenic woman who had been days without her medicine, chest deep in water, groping toward a helicopter as it descended noisily toward her. "We were yelling at her to turn and come to us," he said. "She didn't hear us. Shingles flew off roofs and all that kind of shit. The water was like an ocean. I turned my back because the water was kicking the hell out of us. Somebody starts screaming. I turned around and she's gone underwater because of all this turbulence. That's when I ended up in the water. We got her. We got a few others on that run."



At the end of the day on the water, Penn returned to a landing area in the Garden District where he and his friends had ferried the people they'd rescued. All of them were still waiting at the water's edge. "Nobody was there for decontamination, nobody was there for medical relief, nobody was there to transfer these people out of there," Penn said. He spent the rest of the night shuttling the rescued victims to a clinic.

Now that the situation in New Orleans was no longer about emergency response, Penn declared himself "a little depressed about it." He said, "When it was about pulling people out of water, that's a no-brainer." But "where do they go? How do you feed them? How do you get them to start their own lives back up again? How do you figure out who's the child molester? Now I'm as confused as the government about what to do." He said, "I struggle with the notion that my mind doesn't go far enough. I'm always frustrated by intellectual restrictions. My frustration's with my brain, not with my heart. My heart's clear. I don't have a problem there."

"You've been eating again."

Whether by accident or by design, Penn has cast himself on the world stage as a sort of one-man Citizen Watch. In his interview with Larry King, Penn had pulled his punches about President Bush and his late response to Katrina—"Clearly there's a lot of political issues that are surrounding this that'll come out in the wash" was his only rueful comment. Nonetheless, over the years he has consistently sought to get right up under Bush's chin. For his pieces in the *Chronicle*, Penn tried, and failed, to interview the President; in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, he famously paid fifty-six thousand dollars to publish an open letter to Bush on a nearly full page of the Washington *Post*. "Many of your actions to date and those proposed seem to violate every defining principle of this country over which you preside: intolerance of debate . . . marginalization of your critics, the promoting of fear through unsubstantiated rhetoric, manipulation of a quick comfort media, and the position of your administration's deconstruction of civil liberties all contradict the very core of the patriotism you claim," he wrote.

In the same letter, Penn invoked his father ("He raised me with a deep belief in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights"). "My dad was a hero to all of us," Chris Penn told me. "I think it's easy to say that Sean wants to be a hero. I see what he does around the world, and, you know, I think that his heart's always in the right place. And is some of it wanting to have a little credit as a hero? Maybe. I think there's also a kind of innocence, which my father to a degree had. I think I'm a little too cynical. Most heroes get killed." Baerwald agreed. "I think there's a part of Sean that isn't gonna be happy until he gets murdered by the Republican noise machine," he said. "Until he finds out what it's like to feel like his dad."

Penn took me downstairs to the kitchen, where Hopper was studying an earth-science textbook at the vast blond-wood kitchen counter, waiting for his father to check his homework. "Give me a few minutes," Penn told Hopper. Turning back to me, he said under his breath, "I used to hate doing homework." He poured some Cracker Jacks into a bowl and led me out of earshot, to a patio overlooking a walled garden and the pool. "I'm under investigation by the Office of Foreign Assets Control, the Treasury Department," he said. "It's a five-year investigation. Did I violate the embargo by going to Iraq under Hussein? Did I spend money? Did I use my American passport to get there? All those things. The answer to those questions is no." He added, "We know it came from the White House. My lawyer in Washington knows that." Penn has been told by friends in the L.A.P.D. that he is under surveillance.

On the way out, Penn had paused at a side table. "There's a cool picture of my dad here," he said. "That's him directing." In the photograph, a viewfinder was hanging around Leo Penn's neck; his jaw was tight and his chin assertively thrust forward. We stood together for a moment scrutinizing the image of command, and I thought of something that Penn had told me earlier in the day. "My dad loved humans and humanity," he'd said. "I'm good on humanity." ♦

LETTER FROM EUROPE

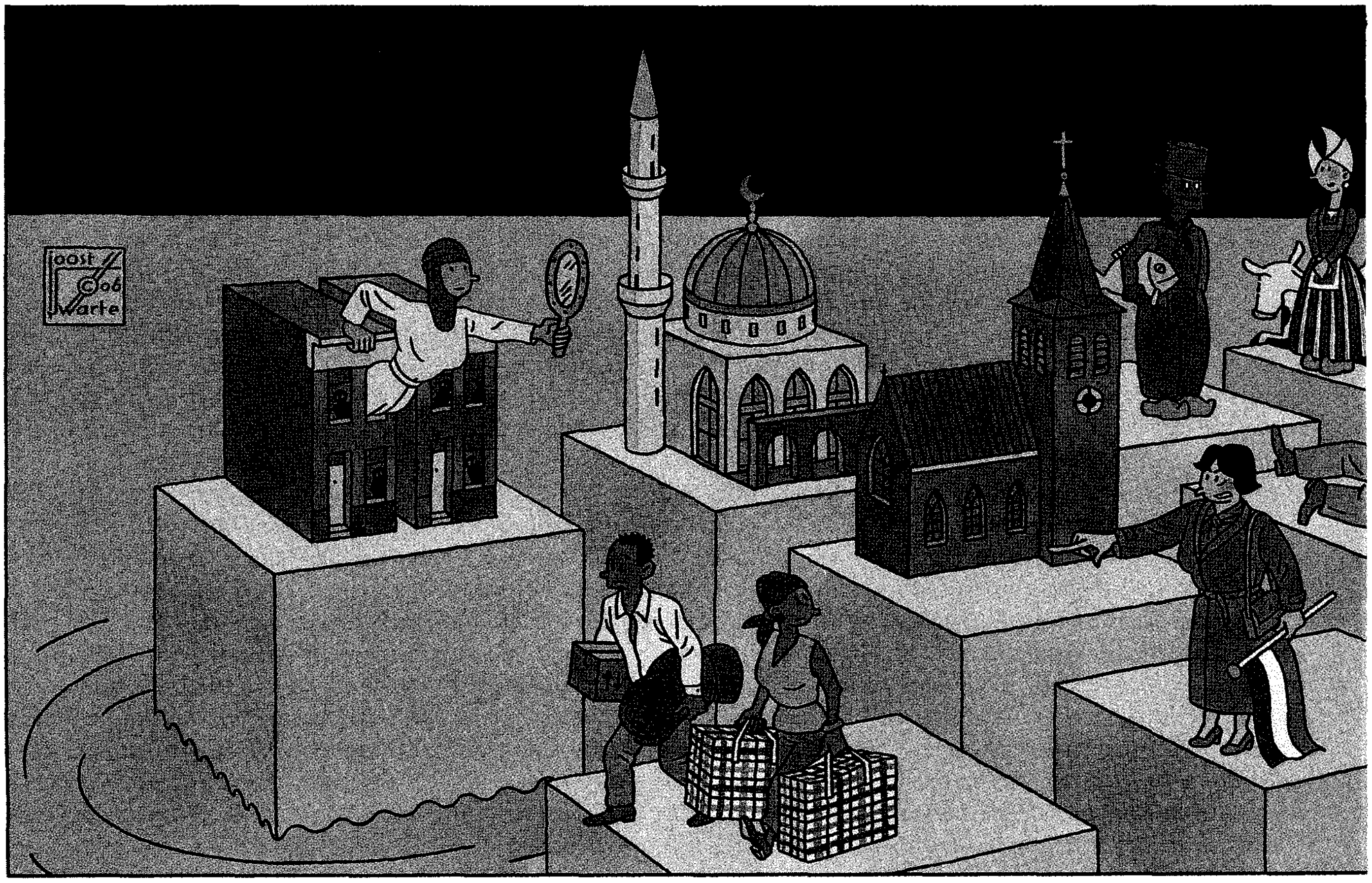
THE DUTCH MODEL

Multiculturalism and Muslim immigrants.

BY JANE KRAMER

Consider this story. In the fall of 2004, on the day a Dutch filmmaker is murdered in Amsterdam by a Dutch-Moroccan fanatic (who explains later, at his trial, that it wasn't "personal," it was simply that Islamic law compels him "to chop off the head of anyone who insults Allah and the Prophet"), an artist in Rotterdam paints an angel on his studio window, along with the date and the words "Thou Shalt Not Kill." There is a mosque on the artist's street, and apparently some men from the mosque, walking by the studio the next day, see the painting and get mad; they consider the Sixth Commandment to be a racist statement, directed at them, and they complain to the imam. Somebody calls the police. Rotterdam, at the time, is run by an anti-immigrant party founded by another murdered (though not by a Muslim) Dutchman, Pim Fortuyn, but never mind. The police, ordered by the mayor to be vigilant against provocation, do not want trouble in a city with one of the greatest concentrations of Muslims in Holland, so they proceed to the scene and call for trucks with power hoses to destroy the painting. Meanwhile, a local television reporter sets out with a cameraman, expecting to talk to the artist about his window, discovers the mosque chairman, the police, and the trucks, and tries to protect it. He is arrested, and some of his footage is erased, but the rest makes its way onto the Internet. There is a minor scandal, after which the mayor apologizes to the artist and the reporter. He allows that, in the interest of harmony, the city has made a small mistake. Everyone wins this multicultural round but the angel.

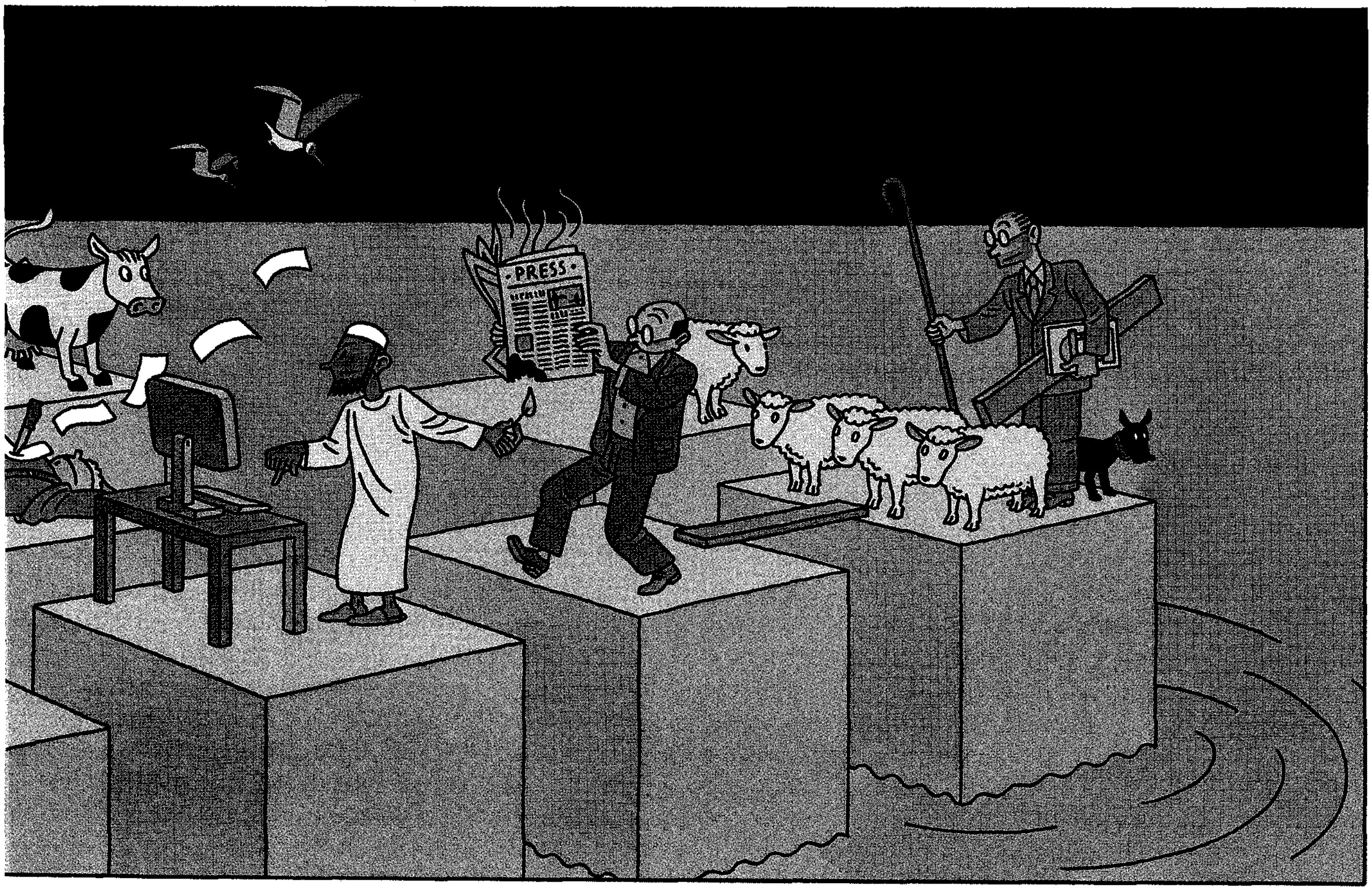
It is an ur-Dutch story. Even the murdered filmmaker, Theo van Gogh, bore an almost mythically Dutch name. (He was Vincent van Gogh's great-great-grandnephew.) But it is not so different, in terms of the questions it raises about free speech and cross-cultural coercion, from a lot of recent European stories. The most recent, of course, began in Copenhagen last fall, when the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* took up the cause of a children's-book writer who couldn't find an illustrator



Today, there are anywhere from fifteen to twenty jihadist groups in Holland. As many as twenty men and women, among them liber willing to sign his name to a book about Islam, and invited a group of cartoonists to “test the limits of self-censorship” with drawings about the Prophet. It is seventeen years since Ayatollah Khomeini issued his famous fatwa against Salman Rushdie, a citizen of Britain, for the “crime” of writing “The Satanic Verses.” The West is still under attack for being itself—secular, democratic, and libertarian—but the fatwas no longer arrive from the mosques of Qum or Cairo. As often as not, they come from a young man with a laptop in a city like Amsterdam or Copenhagen—from immigrants or the children of immigrants, born in Europe. For the Dutch, it remains van Gogh's murder—*their* murder—and its aftermath that opened the floodgates of intimidation that have now sent twelve Danish cartoonists into hiding.

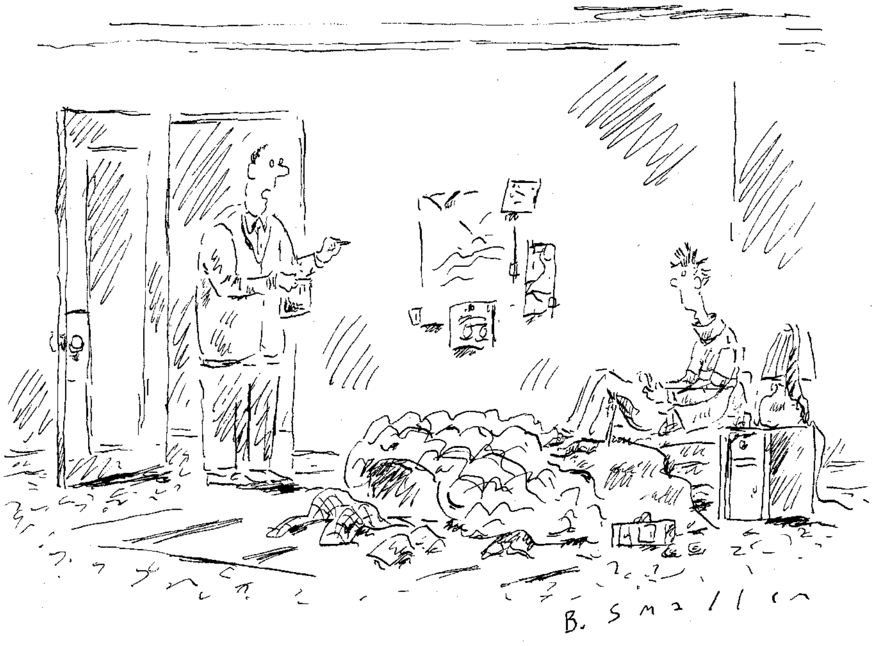
There are said to be fifteen million Muslims in Western Europe—the result of postwar and post-colonial migrations, labor recruitment, and the demographics of a rapidly expanding immigrant population drawn from cultures that do not concede much in the way of rights to women, and often judge them by the number of male children they produce. If you count illegal immigration, there are certainly more. Every country in Western Europe has had to concoct elaborate strategies not only for absorbing its Muslim immigrants but for dealing with Islamic identity at its most insistent. But the truth is that the subject of identity is as charged for Europeans as it has become for the immigrants themselves. When labor recruitment began in Western Europe, in the nineteen-sixties, most Europeans had never thought of themselves as living in immigration countries—despite the historical evidence that they almost always had. In the event, they could not anticipate the trouble they would have, decades later, when Europe's young Muslims, frustrated in their prospects, unnerved by discrimination, courted by fundamentalist mullahs and imams from North Africa and the Middle East, and stirred by the rhetoric of the new Internet jihad, were persuaded that the redress they sought was not to be found in jobs or classrooms but in symbols of “respect”—that they could fight exclusion with self-exemption, and due process with Sharia.

A great deal has been written about van Gogh's death in the past year and a half. But I came upon the Rotterdam story only a few months ago, in Amsterdam, where I was poking through the arcana, real, virtual, and rhetorical, of Holland's ongoing immigrant crisis and was sent to see a sociologist named Albert Benschop, who teaches media studies at the University of Amsterdam. Benschop, by way of tracking Islamist recruitment on the Internet with his students, had become something of a one-man archive of what he calls “jihad in the Netherlands” lore. After van Gogh's murder, he produced a casebook of the crime, “Chronicle of a Political Murder Foretold.” It was a narrative of the missed clues, outmoded technology, civic placidity, inept intelligence, uneasy discrimination, lax laws, and official “tolerance” that had led to the murder, or, at any rate, left the murderer free to kill. By the time I met Benschop, he had revised the casebook, bringing it up to date with incidents



JOOST SWARTE

utch Muslim writers and politicians and teachers, are under full-time police protection because of death threats.



"Your mother and her drug-sniffing dog were cleaning your room and happened upon this."

• •

like the Rotterdam story—incidents that added up to a portrait of a country unravelling under the shock of an act of terror that was, if not personal, chillingly specific in its challenge to the much vaunted tranquillity of Holland's official face.

The Dutch are not confrontational. They admit to being better at talking about what they should have done than what they could be doing now. So perhaps it isn't surprising that they still discuss their immigrant problem in terms of Theo van Gogh's murder. Or that many of them seem convinced that they can solve the problem only if they determine whether van Gogh, arguably the Lenny Bruce of Holland, was being "provocative" or "insensitive" or merely his irrepressibly insulting self when he called Muslims "goat fuckers." Or when he directed "Submission," an eleven-minute film of unremitting tedium (aired once, in the summer of 2004, on Dutch television), which featured the lament of a young Muslim woman with words from the Koran superimposed on her bruised, beaten, and transparently veiled body. Van Gogh's was a ritual killing. He was shot eight times, his throat was slit repeatedly in the attempt to behead him, and a five-page warning to unbelievers, driven into his chest with a fillet knife, proclaimed the imminent death of the Dutch-Somali woman who wrote "Submission." Her name was Ayaan Hirsi Ali. She was a passionately lapsed Muslim and, as it happens, a member of the Dutch parliament.

A lot of people in Holland liked van Gogh, even some of the people he insulted, and he had plenty of opportunity for that—a newspaper column and a couple of radio and television shows, along with the movies he made. In terms of his targets, he was indiscriminate, eclectic, and unsparing. His friends—many of them young Muslims from his films and television series—included the famous Moroccan comic Najib Amhali, who at a party in van Gogh's memory, the night before his funeral, warmed up the crowd with a rant against unbelievers that stopped, midsentence, with "Wait a minute! Sorry! Wrong speech!" Those friends still sit in cafés or around dinner tables and tell "Theo" stories, all of them outrageous and sure to enrage somebody or some group, but none of them something you expected to get murdered for in twenty-first-century Amsterdam.

Every country that sent troops to Afghanistan and Iraq has had to accept the likelihood of some sort of terrorist attack, and Holland was no exception. But by most accounts the Dutch were expecting a catastrophic attack on public space—on parliament, in The Hague, say, or on a plane or in an airport. They might easily have had one. Mohammed Bouyeri, the man who murdered van Gogh, had applied for a job at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport, the third-biggest airport on the Continent, and came so close to getting one that he had actually gone out and got the uniform. Fourteen of his friends have since been arrested on charges involving terrorism; nine were convicted, and six are now serving sentences of as much as fifteen years. But public attacks almost by definition would have claimed Muslim as well as Dutch lives, and might even have united the country in the kind of living-together-and-getting-on-with-it-is-the-best-revenge response of the Spanish, after the commuter-train bombings in Madrid, in 2004, and the British, after the London bus and subway bombings, last year. What's clear today, seventeen months after van Gogh's gruesome death, is that the Dutch are neither getting on with it nor living together very well.

People who speak out are frightened. Benschop told me about Web sites for high-school and even grade-school children that were used by Bouyeri and members of his jihadist cell to announce van Gogh's murder in advance, and to threaten Hirsi Ali. He says that similar sites are now spreading the jihad to thousands of Dutch Muslim children. Barely pubescent girls use them to pledge their devotion to the cause; they post pictures of themselves shrouded in burkas. Teen-age wanna-be martyrs compare the virgins they will meet in Heaven; they argue about whether those virgins will emerge intact from each deflowering or be replaced by "fresh" ones. The Web sites are part of a new European network of what Benschop calls "lite terrorists"—young cheerleaders of the jihad, ready to give refuge and protection to people who actually *are* terrorists. "Virtual civil war was declared on those sites," Benschop told me. Today, there are anywhere from fifteen to twenty jihadist groups, most of them Moroccan, in Holland. As many as twenty men and women, among them liberal Dutch Muslim writers and politicians and teachers, are now under full-time police protection because of death threats that arrive in the morning mail or circulate on the Internet, waiting for their victims to find them.

It could be said that each European country misreads its immigrants in its own way and that way becomes a kind of self-portrait. France assumed that it could turn millions of poor North African workers into French republicans by conferring citizenship on their children at birth. Germany practiced *jus sanguinis*, and never even opened the possibility of citizenship to its two million Turks until the late nineties. But it's safe to say that no country was as smug as Holland in its particular misreadings, or as unmindful of what the Harvard historian Oscar Handlin once called "the history of alienation and its consequences."

In Holland, the official euphemism for immigrants and their children is *allochtoon*, and it is used even for children born in Holland, who have the right to Dutch citizenship when they turn eighteen. There are three million *allochtonen* in the country now—a little under twenty per cent of the population. Muslims, two-thirds of them Moroccans and Turks, account for nearly a million. Turkish labor recruitment began officially in 1964, with a contract with Ankara, and Moroccan recruitment in 1969, with a contract with Rabat; it lasted until the oil crisis of the early seventies. The Turks who came were mainly peasants from the Anatolian plains. About a quarter of the Moroccans were Arab fellahin; the rest were Berbers, most of them tribesmen from the mountains of the Rif, on the country's northeast coast. The Rifians had attitude. They had managed to remain unpacified in all but name during Morocco's forty-four years as a French protectorate, when the Rif was known, to both Arabs and French, and even to other Berbers, as part of the *bled es-siba*, the land of dissidence—though no one seems to have informed the Dutch. Most of them were illiterate and even more stubbornly unworldly than the Anatolian peasants who had come before them. It wasn't so much that they didn't adapt to Dutch culture and Dutch law; they kept to themselves, they spoke in their own language, and, apart from their jobs, they hardly knew there was such a thing as Dutch culture or Dutch law.

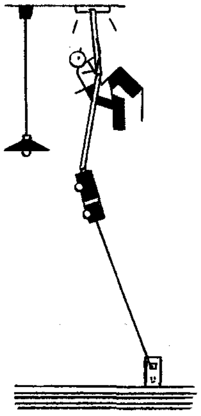
The immigrants' isolation had little to do with neglect, benign or hostile—Holland is a rich welfare state, and was even then quite egalitarian in its dispensations. Their isolation had to do with what passed for up-to-the-minute social policy, and that policy was enshrined not by some heady multicultural sixties or seventies left but, officially, in the early eighties, by a Christian Democratic Prime Minister and steel industrialist named Ruud Lubbers and a center-right government. Lubbers—four subsequent years as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees notwithstanding (he left under a cloud of sexual-harassment charges)—was not much interested in making Dutchmen out of Muslim immigrants. "My job then was modernizing the Dutch economy," he told me when I drove to Rotterdam to see him. He wanted to keep the country's new workers working, and not disrupt their lives or exhaust their patience with official encouragement to mingle with their new neighbors. "Our theory was that people in a multicultural society needed space to preserve their own culture and their own language" is the way he put it. "I am a Christian Democrat—not French, not *étatiste*. Emancipation doesn't take place only in the public sphere."

It was an old Dutch theory. Lubbers called it "our typical Dutch twist" on social peace, and he had a point, since the Dutch had been dividing themselves into "pillars" (meaning the pillars of different faiths holding up the country) since the Catholics and the Protestants stopped fighting in the seventeenth century and decided to live "separately" together. By the early twentieth century, pillar society was for all practical purposes institutionalized. Holland had a Catholic pillar, a Protestant pillar, and a "humanist" pillar—each with the right to its own neighborhoods, unions, hospitals, and schools, and, in time, its own state-supported media. You could grow up Catholic, like Lubbers, in a big Dutch city and inhabit an entirely Catholic world; you could grow up secular and liberal, like van Gogh, and never look at a paper or watch a channel that wasn't yours.

Pillar society was permissive. It let you alone. You didn't have to love your neighbor, or even accommodate to your neighbor, only to "tolerate" him and occasionally come together with him in places where the rules were clear, like parliament. It had nothing to do with the hybrid adventure of contemporary urban life, and, inevitably, it was crumbling before the Rifians and the Turks arrived. The Catholic pillar all but collapsed after Vatican II. But the ethos, and the legal structures, of separateness persisted, and it was the first and often the most enduring lesson about living in Holland that immigrants learned. In the nineteen-seventies, when recruitment stopped and the Muslims who stayed were allowed to import their families, the world those families entered could, with very little effort, be made to resemble home.

The man responsible for Lubbers's Dutch model for efficiently integrating immigrant labor was a cultural anthropologist named Rinus Penninx. When I met Penninx in the fall, he had just retired after twelve years as the head of the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, at the University of Amsterdam. But in the early eighties he was a government policy planner, on loan from the culture ministry to the Minister of the Interior. His report on immigration policy became official in 1983. ("I took my own advice as a policymaker," is what he says.) It remains a singularly shortsighted document, but at the time it was considered a beacon of multicultural correctness. It assured the immigrants' right to "socioeconomic equality," to "inclusion and participation in the political domain," and, finally, to "equity in the domains of culture and religion"—which is to say, the right to be "authentically" themselves. Authenticity was a nice folkloric fiction—"integration, not assimilation," Penninx calls it—but it wasn't going to prepare a Berber from the Rif for life in a modern European city, and it certainly didn't allow for the fact that choosing a Rifian life in, say, Amsterdam wasn't the same as choosing a wine bar if you liked wine, or a marijuana café if you preferred reefer.

Paul Scheffer, a well-known Amsterdam intellectual often mentioned as a potential Labor Party candidate, once told me that the country had "let its immigrants rot in their own privacy." "We said, 'Leave the children their language of origin, leave them their own history, because they're going back.' It became a mantra. Twenty years went by and they didn't go back, and it was still a mantra. But, once you accept that multicultural argument against teaching them *our* history, you are excluding them from collective memory, from an enormous chance for renewal. So generation one tried to re-create the fantasy world of home, and generation two had no cultural context, no identification, either with its parents or with the culture here. September 11th gave many of them their narrative. To the extent that radicalization—radical, international Islam—is linked to preventing integration, that may be very difficult to control."



Six years ago, Scheffer published a long essay called "The Multicultural Drama" in the daily *NRC Handelsblad*, and broke what amounted to a national taboo; he acknowledged that the Dutch, like everybody else in Europe, had an immigrant problem. The relief—and the denial—was enormous. The left, which had come to power in 1994, had long since taken up Lubbers's multicultural model, not for its economic uses but as a kind of ethnographically moral mission. Immigrant problems were not discussed by tolerant liberal people, especially by people from a social-democratic party like the Labor Party. They belonged to right-wing tabloids and old Dutch farmers from the Catholic south who had arguably never seen an immigrant, not to someone like Scheffer who actually cared about immigrants and about what happened to them in Holland. "I said there is a division in our society," Scheffer told me. "We had been too self-congratulatory to see it. I said that we were basically a conformist society, that we were unprepared for cultural alienation, and that we couldn't be open to immigration until we admitted the problem and worked it out. I said it was our fault. The immigrants are not leaving. It's their responsibility to make something of it . . . but we have to share the guilt. The idea that 'physical segregation is everything' was a fallacy. We were a daily bombardment of shock to them, but we had this wonderful negligence, this almost unbearable innocence about being a beacon."

People in Amsterdam say that for months no one with an audience talked or wrote about anything else. By then, nearly fifteen per cent of the city's population was Muslim. There was a small but comfortable Muslim middle class; there were Muslims working in the arts, in the universities, and in city government. Even working-class Muslims—most notably the Turks—were in the main cautious if disgruntled citizens. But sixty per cent of all first-generation Turkish and Moroccan workers were unemployed, and what Scheffer called "the subtle exclusion of the welfare state" was no longer enough to obscure the malaise in immigrant neighborhoods. The idea that Dutch society came with a price—that its laws and its mores, secular and democratic, were part of the hard bargain with reality that an immigrant had to make—wasn't going to solve the unemployment crisis. But Scheffer said that if everyone, Dutch and immigrant, actually acknowledged that there *was* a price it would be a way for some of those workers to begin to enter the world around them, and make their malaise a common cause, and not simply a statistic.

The old left split on the subject of Scheffer's essay. Job Cohen, Amsterdam's Jewish mayor and easily the most popular Labor politician in the country, insisted that in most ways the Dutch model of patience and tolerance and cultural respect was slowly but surely working. (His Muslim alderman, Ahmed Aboutaleb, thought that the problem was much simpler. When local Islamists railed against Dutch "decadence," he pointed out that there were plenty of planes to Casablanca, and that anyone that unhappy in Holland was free to take one.) Cohen is a conciliator. "Keeping Everything Together" is his slogan. "*Lief, leuk, laf*" (sweet, nice, cowardly), his critics say. I had heard that the imam of Amsterdam's most radical Moroccan mosque refused to meet Cohen or even reply to his invitations, but when I asked him about it one morning at City Hall he said only that in Holland religious life was "private," and at any rate not his domain. "I can't just call a meeting and you have to come," he said. He reminded me that, by Dutch standards, Amsterdam was an exceptionally cosmopolitan city, "always pushing limits," and that people tended to forget that the gap between immigrant culture and Dutch culture, and expectations, was in some ways greatest there. "It isn't so easy being happy . . . in this very cold society," he told me. Later, he said—I thought with a certain relief—that maybe the time had come to "formalize" citizenship training. He was right. A year earlier, Amsterdam's gay-pride parade, a local fixture since the mid-nineties, had provoked an explosion of threats on the city's Moroccan Web sites. "Let me get my hands on them, those faggots," a man named Mohammed Jabri had written. They defile the street with their "hairy behinds," he said. They "infect my Amsterdam."

Mohamed Rabbae, a Dutch-Moroccan Arab who came to Holland to study in 1966 and stayed to become the first Moroccan elected to the Dutch parliament, has been a voice for accommodation on both sides of the divide. I visited Rabbae at his home in Maarssen last fall. It was Ramadan, and he was fasting, but he had put out a platter of dates—a traditional Moroccan welcome—and sat patiently while I ate them. He said that the problem for him as a liberal Dutch Muslim was not that people were suddenly arguing about multiculturalism and Islam but that the "collegiality" in their arguments had disappeared. He agreed with Cohen, but he also seemed to agree with some of what Scheffer said, and when I asked him about van Gogh he told me, "He was a humorist, he was against Muslims, but in Holland you get to finish your act." He thought that in the past few years people had lost the will "to manage the way they communicate with each other"—had even forgotten that in civilized societies "there is always a frame in which you criticize." He said that the humiliation that comes from discrimination has run very deep in Muslim immigrants since van Gogh's death. "Of course, as a liberal I defend free speech. But, as a Muslim, I have to defend Islam. I am less than libertarian when it comes to prejudice."

Some people on the left are much more defensive than Rabbae. They maintain that the old multicultural model is the only model that can work in Holland. (The leader of the Green Left Party calls herself a "human-rights universalist" when it comes to culture.) A new generation of social scientists at schools like the University of Amsterdam argues that the mandate to "mix" into something called the Dutch community is an insult to the communities where immigrants already live. Amsterdam's born-again Marxists, many of them Muslim students, insist that the problem in Holland isn't veils or burkas or any of their other "symbols of cultural emancipation"—they call those "bourgeois Western preoccupations"—or even the imams who say to go ahead and beat your wife. The problem, they say, is class, capitalism, and old-fashioned colonial contempt.

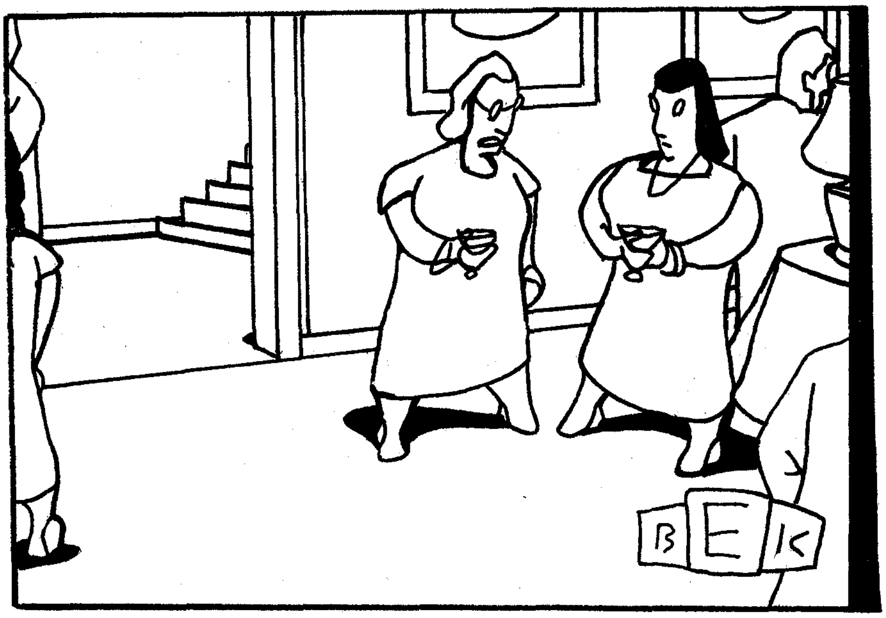
I asked a Moroccan feminist-cum-radical activist named Miriyam Aouragh for her opinion. Aouragh had been part of a clique of angry students and teachers "with a relationship to the Middle East" who staged a protest when Hirsi Ali came to the University of Amsterdam last fall to speak at the formal opening of the academic year—an occasion that Aouragh describes as "dead white men, but younger." She told me that Holland was caught in a xenophobia that had as much to do with dismantling the welfare state as with anything immigrants did or wore or said. "If you are Muslim and want to be a star, say terrible things about other Muslims" was how she described dissidents like Hirsi Ali. She told me about a high-school student who had written a newspaper column calling Rifians "stink Berbers," and who "got lots of threats but plenty of attention, plenty of applause, for her racist talk, and became a feminist icon." She said it was very Dutch to blame the victim.

It all came down to the question of victims. The left thought of immigrants as victims, the right thought of immigrants as victimizers, but, as Scheffer put it, the gulf between a moral code that says wife-beating is right and one that says it's wrong is pretty much unbridgeable, and perhaps the best thing the Dutch could do for immigrants was to begin to apply the same standards they applied to themselves.

Here is another Dutch story. In 2002, the Turks in an old working-class Amsterdam neighborhood called the Baarsjes submit plans for a big new mosque. Their plans come from a firm of Jewish architects in Paris. They include a minaret of a hundred and forty feet, and the old Dutch people in the neighborhood complain. They say that a minaret of a hundred and forty feet will dwarf their church steeples, that it will mean the end of "Dutchness" in the Baarsjes, that it will announce to the world that Islam is taking over Holland. One former alderwoman is so distressed that she sues the city, which quickly opens negotiations between the minaret people and the steeple people. It wants to keep the steeple people happy—which is to say, voting Labor—and at the same time it sees a chance to reward progressive immigrant behavior. Four years later, the mosque elders reach an agreement with the city. They will allow women to enter the mosque through the front door (this was not a given), and they will limit their calls to prayer to Fridays; the minaret stays at a hundred and forty feet. Permission is granted, construction finally begins, but the complaints continue. The question of who wins *this* multicultural round is still open.

The Baarsjes is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the city. Half the people are *allochtonen*, and the local mayor—the closest equivalent would be a New York borough president—is a Labor mainstay named Henk van Waveren, who has put in eleven years trying to accommodate them all. His constituency includes not only the Turkish mosque and a Pakistani mosque but also the Moroccan mosque whose "thorny imam," as he puts it, is said to refuse to meet with Job Cohen. Van Waveren himself has never met the imam. The imam, he tells me, does not speak Dutch.

Van Waveren has realistic, if earnest, expectations. He thinks that, at this point, the most he can do for the Baarsjes is simply to "diminish the feeling of uncertainty" that came from so many years of Holland "having the wrong answers." He told me, "How many extremists can there be here? What I want is to unite the sheep." His projects are modest. He "rewarded" the eleven Moroccan fathers who were briefly persuaded to patrol a particularly dangerous street, a job that consisted mainly of chasing their sons inside after ten at night; he encouraged the Orthodox Jew who was tired of getting sworn at on his way to shul and wanted to organize Jewish-Moroccan street-soccer matches; he drummed up funds for a new community center with a proper soccer field. He says that the problem in neighborhoods like his is



"I can't remember if I didn't like his second book or his second wife."

CONSOLIDATE YOUR DEBTS WHILE LOWERING YOUR MONTHLY PAYMENTS AND EATING A HOT DOG.

simply getting the sheep—Dutch as well as Muslim—to stand up and be counted.

Immigration is now close to being the most important political issue in Holland, or, you could say, the only winning, or losing, issue. Pim Fortuyn's murder, in 2002, effectively ended eight years of Labor government in The Hague. Fortuyn was killed by an animal-rights activist, but it didn't take long for a lot of voters to decide that the murder must have had something to do with immigrants—and with Labor's being "soft" on immigrants. Dead or alive, Fortuyn remained the most popular politician in Holland. He had been a gift to the right. Flagrantly homosexual—he once claimed that he "understood" Moroccans because he'd slept with so many Moroccan boys—he provided the right with an entirely unexpected chance to court gay voters and, at the same time, to launder its xenophobia into a righteous stand against Islamist homophobia. It was a chance that the left had never even thought to seize.

Holland has been run by a coalition of the right for the past four years. There is a Christian Democratic Prime Minister, Jan Peter Balkenende, but the Liberal Party—a conservative free-market party edging to the anti-immigrant right—controls many of the ministries that have to do with foreigners. The Minister for Immigration and Integration is a former prison warden named Rita Verdonk, whose solution to any problem involving immigrants is to throw them out. She has introduced legislation that would allow the government to deport "foreigners"—many of them second-generation Dutch citizens—after one criminal infraction. And she has been trying to enforce an old Labor law to process and rule on asylum-seekers' applications within one week of their arrival, and is limiting their time to appeal to only a week. She has said that she has no choice, given that Europe cannot agree on a common asylum policy. The image she sells is of Holland as the European Union's refugee dumping ground.

There are thousands of asylum-seekers in limbo in Holland, and their situation is tragic. Verdonk has sequestered many of them in holding camps, where they wait for deportation along with drug smugglers and criminals caught entering with false papers. Last fall, when eleven detainees died in a fire (the third) in a makeshift and demonstrably unsafe holding prison at Schiphol airport—poor fireproofing, no system to automatically open cells in an emergency—Verdonk went out of her way to praise the guards, who, according to most reports, did very little at first to save them. She claims that she has never heard a real complaint from an immigrant, though when I showed up at her office last fall there were police everywhere, a hole in the office window, and a lot of whispers about a possible Muslim sniper. (A month later, the Ministry announced that no bullet had been found.) In January, when the city of Rotterdam came up with a "citizenship code" that involved a pledge to speak only Dutch in public places, including on the street, Verdonk called it a model for the whole country and suggested that speaking Dutch be made compulsory. She recanted quickly, but, as of March 15th, anyone applying to immigrate to Holland will have to pass an exam in Dutch, and watch a video about gay couples and nude beaches.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was once an asylum-seeker. Everybody knows her story—the beautiful young Somali who endured a clitoral circumcision and an arranged marriage to a distant cousin she had never seen, fled to Holland, studied hard, "discovered the Enlightenment," and became as famous as Queen Beatrix. But it is also the story of the failure of liberal Dutch imagination—and, from the point of view of Dutch politics, the failure of the social democrats who were her first, and perhaps her natural, political home. Hirsi Ali joined the Labor Party in 1997, at the age of twenty-seven, and worked at a Labor think tank doing research on immigration. But the truth was that, for many on the left, she was a refugee who had made good, and who should be grateful to them instead of embarrassing them with pronouncements about the incompatibility of democracy and orthodox Islam, and about deporting radical imams and disciplining Muslims who took their children out of school. She wasn't a multiculturalist, and she had nothing but contempt for the Dutch model. She thought that Dutch "tolerance" was a kind of Western weakness. She said that Muslims who wouldn't attempt to assimilate didn't belong in Holland.

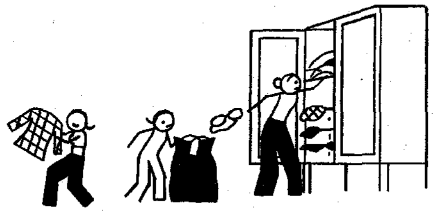
Labor did nothing to absorb her, to temper her rage with any political wisdom or to take her experience of Islam and learn something useful from it or to give her the political voice she needed. The Party thought she was too angry, too politically incorrect. And she was zealous, like all converts, including converts to Mill and Hayek. She told people like Job Cohen that they were wrong when they said, If I treat you well, you will not be my enemy. She said that radical Islam would always be their enemy. She told the Muslim feminists, who had offered to support her if she promised "not to say anything about Islam," that "the oppression of women is built into Islam." It was probably only a matter of time before the right took up her cause and began to court her. She was their token stranger, their "good" minority, as improbably useful as a Pim Fortuyn—a Muslim anti-Muslim feminist poster-girl celebrity with a shelf full of human-rights prizes and a book of essays published in eleven languages. In the fall of 2002, she joined the Liberal Party and two months later ran on its list for parliament. The company was not, sadly, always on her level. With van Gogh's death, she became the next designated victim, and she remains that, even with Bouyeri in prison. She moves under heavy guard, in a kind of psychic quarantine.

"The left was mugged by reality," she told me one afternoon, over tea at a hotel in Amsterdam. (The place, even the city, had been switched three times, for safety.) I had seen her on television that morning, in conversation with the Mayor. Cohen had brought up the asylum-seekers trapped in the airport fire, and she had suggested that, on humanitarian grounds, the ones who had survived the fire should be allowed to stay. When the debate was over, she told me, she had felt obliged to call her party to explain, though it wasn't at all clear if the Party was placated. Hirsi Ali is intelligent and graceful, and I imagined how hard it must have been for her to discover that her adopted country, her Enlightenment country, was mired in a rhetoric of "tolerance" that was really, perhaps, just another way of saying that people were "different," that people never changed. She has been in Holland for thirteen years now, and in some ways she is the mirror of those years.

The night before the anniversary of van Gogh's murder, I went to an evening of short debates on the subject of Islam in Holland—the first of a series of commemorations that ran the gamut from private "Theo reminiscences" to memorial services that half the politicians in the country scrambled to appropriate. The debates were held at a cultural center on Keizersgracht called the Rode Hoed, or Red Hat. I knew it as a casual, companionable place—the sort of place you chose to rendezvous with a friend or read the paper over a cup of coffee—but that night you had to pass through two security checkpoints to enter, and I counted twenty security guards and armed policemen on duty in the lobby. Their job was to protect Amsterdam's black-clad intellectuals from an Islamist attack, and, more to the point, to protect Hirsi Ali, who was on the program, and another Muslim dissident named Afshin Ellian, a Dutch-Iranian professor who, like her, was under serious death threat. But there were no black burkas in the audience and, conspicuously, no practicing Muslims scheduled to debate. There was not even a practicing anti-Muslim, apart from Hirsi Ali and Ellian.

Gary Schwartz, an American-born art historian who immigrated to Holland as a graduate student and is now considered one of its foremost Rembrandt scholars, had come to the debates with me, and, after looking around for a few minutes, he remarked that it was going to be a predictably "Amsterdam" occasion. He thought it would have been much more interesting if the organizers had managed to include one of the country's right-wing populists—say, Geert Wilders, a flamboyant but straight version of Pim Fortuyn whose claim to serious attention had mainly to do with the number of threats he received. "Maybe I'm profiling the crowd," Schwartz said, "but this won't be a testing of the issues," or even an airing of what he had once called feelings you couldn't describe but knew you didn't want to have. He thought it likely that no one outside the closed circle of the Rode Hoed would be listening anyway. "People like Mohammed Bouyeri aren't interested in the Dutch situation," he said. "They listen to the Saudis, to Osama; they don't care about what the Dutch do or say to 'resolve' the problems of the terrain they live in." The moderator that night, Cees Grimbergen—the host of a popular weekly discussion show called "Around Ten"—told me that fifty of his last hundred and seventy broadcasts had been devoted to "ordinary people arguing" about multiculturalism and integration. He said that he'd never invited Theo van Gogh to join them. As he put it, "Lenny Bruce is not a Dutch tradition." When he took the mike and peered out at the five hundred faces in his Rode Hoed audience, he asked, "Who here has a season football ticket?" One person raised his hand.

In a way, Holland was like that night—frozen in discussion. Nobody seemed to know what to do beyond policing the discontent and keeping the crackpots at bay. You could feel the tension in Amsterdam then. You could no doubt feel it in February, when the country's big newspapers reprinted the Danish cartoons, and by all accounts you can feel it now. After fifty years of insistent official harmony, the hatreds on both sides of the cultural divide have surfaced. No one is burning mosques or churches or schools—which they did in the first weeks after van Gogh's murder—and even the demonstrations during the cartoon crisis were small and peaceful. But the Internet is still awash in hate mail. So perhaps it isn't surprising that the country remains preoccupied by what happened to Theo van Gogh and what the politically correct position toward people who live in your midst but feel free to kill you should be. Friends who a few years earlier would walk you through a neighborhood like the Baarsjes, with its shrouded women and its state-funded Islamic school and its defiantly secretive mosque, and call this a "multicultural success" or a "model of tolerance," have begun to suspect that that peculiarly Dutch myth of a democracy integrated but not assimilated might be not only a contradiction in terms but a dangerous fiction. But, like everybody else in Europe, they have no adequate answer to the question What now? ♦



FICTION

A BETTER ANGEL

BY CHRIS ADRIAN

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” she told me the first time we met. Six years old, I was digging under a log, looking for worms. This was back when my father still had all his property, and I could walk for the whole afternoon without leaving his orange groves. I spent a lot of time amusing myself that way, making up games, inventing friends to play with, since I really had none of my own, or looking for buried treasure. My sisters were all much older and hated to have me underfoot, so they’d draw fake maps, age them by beating them in the sand with a baseball bat and burning them around the edges, then send me off on quests. I fell for this sort of thing for years.

She was sitting in a tree, gently tapping an orange that hung near her face, making it swing. My imaginary friends were not the kind you could see. I figured her for a smart-aleck picker’s daughter, since it was nearing the end of the season and the groves were full of Guatemalans. She wore a sleeveless yellow dress with a furry kitten face on the front—I remember that very clearly, and remember wondering later how, if she didn’t exist, I could have made that up. Her skin was very dark. Her hair hung past her lap. She looked to be about my age. I ignored her.

Lifting the log up, I disturbed a nest of yellow jackets, which flew out, stinging my face and my neck and my hands. I could see her watching me while I slapped at them and yelled and cried. She said nothing but stood up on the branch and spread her wings out behind her, which amazed and frightened me. I tried to run home but could hardly breathe. I found a group of pickers having their lunch in the grass, and collapsed in front of them, swollen and squeaking.

She came to see me in the hospital. High on I.V. Benadryl, I told anyone who would listen that there was an angel in the room, and the doctors and nurses found that charming. Even back then I was a quick and subtle thinker when I was stoned, and by the time my father asked me about it I had figured out that it would be best to pretend not to know what he was talking about. But when we were alone, and she stood silently at the foot of my bed, looking strange not just on account of the wings but because she was dressed as a doctor, with a white coat and a stethoscope and her hair done up in a smart bun, I asked her why she hadn’t warned me about the wasps. “I’m not that kind of angel,” she said.

Though my father only ever knew a tenth of the trouble I’ve been in, I was still his least favorite child, and the last person he wanted taking care of him when he got very ill. But every one of my sisters was pregnant—one very much augmented and on purpose, and the other two accidents of fate. How they celebrated the coincidence, and then rued it when it forced them to bully me back to Florida from San Francisco. I was in clinic when they called, and it’s a testament to their power-of-three invincibility that they were able to blow through the phone tree and the two receptionists who routinely deny my existence when patients try to find me.

“Dad is sick,” Charlotte said.

“He’s been sick,” I said, because this had been going on for a year, and though nobody gets better from metastatic small-cell lung cancer, he’d been holding his own for months and months.

“Dad is sicker,” Christine said, and Carmen added, “Much sicker!” She is the eldest and the (barely) most pregnant.

“He’s in the hospital,” Christine said. “There’s an infection.”

“In his bladder,” Charlotte said. There are two years between each of them, but they’ve always seemed like triplets, all with their furrowed brows and disapproving hatchet mouths, all as tall and fair as I am short and dark, all with the same blue eyes that seem just the right color for staring a person down. My eyes, like my father’s, are nearly black, and Carmen says I can hide anything in them.

“A little cystitis,” I said. “So what?”

“Dr. Klar says he’s very ill,” Christine said.

“She doesn’t know if he’ll come out of the hospital,” Charlotte said.

“She always says that,” I said. “She never knows. She’s an alarmist. She’s a worrier.”

“You have to go!” they said all together.

“*You* have to go,” I said. “You go, if it matters so much.”

“We’re pregnant!” they said. And then the individual excuses: mild pre-eclampsia for Charlotte and Christine and a clotty calf for Carmen. They can’t travel from New York, where they live within waddling distance of one another.

“People travel when they’re eight months pregnant,” I said. “People do it all the time!” Though I knew that they didn’t, and now the angel was sitting on my desk and shaking her head at me.

“You’re a doctor,” they said, as if that should settle it, and I wanted to say that I’m impaired, and a pediatrician to boot. I could have confessed right then, to them and to the whole world—*I am an impaired physician*—and then started down the yellow brick road to rehab.

Instead, I quietly hung up on them. The angel was still shaking her head. She was dressed to shock, in a filthy housedress, with a plastic shopping bag on her head and a dead cat wrapped around each foot.

“I barely know him!” I shouted at her, but she didn’t respond. Then I told her I had a patient waiting, which she already knew, because there is nothing I’ve ever been able to hide from her.

“Put that lady and her evil children behind you,” she said, not looking up as I swept by her. She did not like Mrs. Fontaine for the obvious reason, but what she had against her two kids I could not figure out, though she has always done that—pointed out the ones that would grow into car thieves or lottery fixers or murderers, as if I were supposed to smother them with the great pillow of righteous prevention when they were six months old.

The Fontaines were waiting patiently in the exam room, Zebadiah splashing in the sink while his mother fed his sister and his aunt read *Highlights*. I locked the door, and Zebadiah toddled over to check it, an innocent part of our enterprise. “Baby,” Mrs. Fontaine said, meaning me and not her son, “how you been?”

“It’s been a rough day,” I said.

“Well, your friend has got just the thing for a rough day,” she said, and took a little foil-covered package from her diaper bag and laid it on the counter near the sink, and that is all we said about it, because one of our terms of business is a nearly silent sort of discretion. I put down

SAMANTHA EVERTON, “CHRYSALIS 2” (2005)/SANDRA BYRON GALLERY

my envelope and she took it, and when her package was in my pocket we talked about her babies.

I examined Zebadiah and then his sister Lily, who was four months old, fat and happy and singing wordlessly as I listened to her heart and fiddled with her hips. The angel paced in the confines of the room, the cats going *squish* and *squash* as she stepped, and Lily seemed to be watching her. "A fire from Heaven should come down right now," the angel said. Though the medicine was only in my pocket, just having it in my possession made it easier to ignore her.

"She's beautiful," I said to Mrs. Fontaine.

"She's all right," she said, ducking her head and smiling, and her sister reached out to take the baby and hold her for a moment and proclaim that she was indeed a beautiful girl, and then she handed her to her mother, who handed her to me, and then, without knowing why, I handed her back to the sister. Sometimes it happens like that, something entirely bearable, the baby smiling and laughing and going round and round, from hand to hand to hand, and her brother shouting "I'm beautiful, too!" and lifting his arms to be picked up, and all five of us laughing while the angel scowled impotently. I wanted it to go on forever.

"Does everybody get an angel?" I asked her one day, about a month after I met her, when it finally occurred to me to wonder if every boy and girl had a guiding spirit that was invisible to me. I looked around my first-grade class, squinting to see them, the girls in plaid jumpers, the boys in blue pants, looking so ordinary except for their immaculate posture and drooping folded wings.

"Only the ones who will be great or do great things. And sometimes being great is enough. The great things go out, generated as easily as thought or love. Do you understand?"

I cannot describe how gentle her voice could be in those days.

"No," I said. So when we got home she took me into my father's library, ignoring my pleas not to enter without his permission, and sat me down in front of the encyclopedia. I opened a volume at random, and she marked with her finger the men and women who had warranted an angel to guide them into their greatness. There were fewer than I'd expected, and as many who were greatly bad as greatly good. I flipped backward through the "A"s, familiar with only one in ten of the names she touched, making the letters shine in a way I could see forever after. Attila I knew, having just heard of him in history class, and taken part in a little skit for which I dressed up in my mother's furs and shouted in front of the class with five other boys and the girl whose long black hair had landed her the part of the Hun. "But he was bad," I said, and she said that not everybody listened to his angel.

In medical school, I could not wait to get away from adult hospitals and adult medicines and adult patients, from their aching lower backs and chronic depression and get-me-out-of-work-related injuries. I hated especially the little old ladies with their parchment faces and frail broken hearts, who'd die if you so much as frowned at them. Even a half-dead preemie is more resilient. And I hated the smell—children are not so smelly to begin with, and as they get sick or die they do not give off that odor that fills up adult hospitals and blows out of the angel's wings when she shakes them in agitation. It always seemed to cling to me after a particularly egregious fuckup in medical school, so for days afterward, just by sniffing my fingers, I'd be reminded of how I had almost killed this or that poor old zombie with my bad math.

The angel seemed to like the hospital where my father was staying, but then she enjoyed death, or at least it seemed to excite her. She was always making a show of smelling people and predicting the hour of their demise. It became the only thing I was good at, distinguishing the really sick ones in the midst of the confusing daily crowd of patients that were presented to me as a student and then as a resident, though I never could remember how to save them. As we entered my father's Florida hospital, she had a spring in her step, and though she was dressed as a bag lady once again, she'd exchanged her cats for tissue boxes and shined her wings and put on an elegant, if very dirty, hat. To her mind, I was doing the right thing, and so she had taken it easy on me during the trip, and now she bounced along like a schoolgirl. I think she would have been happier only if I had killed myself.

The nurses did not look up when I walked past their station to the end of the hall where my father had his room, or when I hurried by in the opposite direction, fleeing from him. "Here he is," the angel said when I walked in—she'd run ahead the last few feet and passed through the wall. She gestured toward him as if he were a new car or a sexy motorcycle in a showroom. When I'd last seen him, he was the same dour black-eyed man I'd known all my life, my six-foot-four, imperious, responsible reflection, a man who I always knew should have had an angel of his own. Now he was laid out diapered in a filthy bed, as bald and toothless and somehow as grand as Aslan on his table. He looked up at me when I walked in and said by way of greeting "You!" and managed to invest the word with equal measures of disappointment, accusation, and surprise. I dropped my book and candy box and ran out.

Some nights as a resident, I would withdraw into the bathroom and leave the intern to flounder and drown, later claiming that I'd never got the frantic pages when in fact I had turned off my pager and was sitting on the toilet with my face in my hands or taking little hits of whatever I was really into that month. There was a bathroom near the elevator on my father's floor of the hospital, a nice one-person arrangement with a lock on the door.

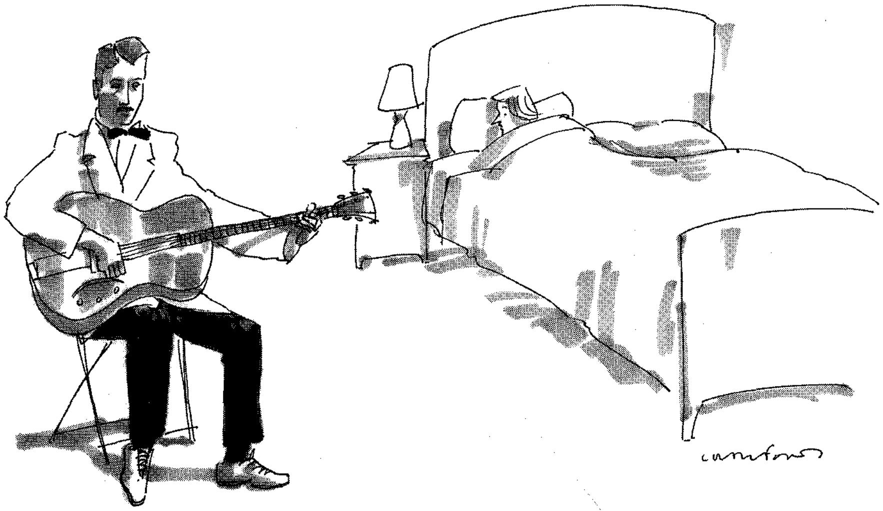
The angel was there in just a few moments—I never know what delays her, when she can travel at the speed of guilt and sometimes seems to be everywhere at once. She berated me while I hid my face, her voice making the little room seem very full, all the "What do you think you're doing?"s and "You get back there"s seeming to bounce off the white walls in discrete packages of sound. I am not this sort of doctor, I said to my hands. I am not any sort of doctor and I don't know what to do about what's back there in that room. And she said that even if you are the sort of doctor who doesn't know anything about medicine, and even if you passed your certifying exams only because you paid a certain Dr. Gupta to bypass the pathetic security measures taken against cheats and impostors by the American Board of Pediatrics, you can still recognize a patient at the extremes of abandonment and grief, and even you can do the smallest human thing to improve his lot.

In answer, I gave her a little toot. Not Mrs. Fontaine but another supplier, someone who had been a sort of girlfriend, though only snortable heroin had brought us together, had had a little horn on her key chain which she would bring out in the face of any sort of adversity—a flat tire or a broken foot or syphilis, syphilis being a two-toot trouble. "Toot them away!" she'd say, and laugh really quite innocently. She was beaten by a boyfriend more passionate but less gentle than me, and died one night in the E.R. at the General Hospital while I was on duty seeing children. I recognized her worked-over corpse when I went into the trauma room to fetch a warm blanket for a cold baby.

With just the smallest hit the angel changed. She'd barely warned me not to do it before she was stretching and shaking her wings, and there was that awful stench for a moment, and then there was another odor, fresh grass and cookies and new snow on the sidewalk. And she cast off her haggery with a few shakes of her head, her eyes bright now but not icy like my sisters', and with several sweeps of her fingers—it's always as if she were primping for me—she combed the tangles out of her hair. Three times she shook her hips and the housedress became a lovely blue sari, and her pretty feet were naked.

"Take that!" I stuttered at her.

"Better have another," she said, and I did. Then she stood in front of me with her hands on my shoulders, steadying them while they shook. It wasn't the first time that I'd felt as if I were flying backward: the toilet was a vessel in the air propelled by weeping, and with her hands she was steering me.



"O.K., Marv, you win. Quit the croonin' and get a condom."

"Do I have to go back there?" I asked her, when I was feeling better.

"Not yet, my love," she said. "Not until you are good and ready."

When I was a child, she was always good, but this is not to say that she was never awful. Though many days she was so ordinary a tag-along that I hardly thought of her as an angel, every so often she would put on such majesty that it made me cower. One day in fifth grade, I was half listening to Mrs. Khemlani's talk about cowboys and Indians. "History always moves west," Mrs. Khemlani said, because that was one of the truisms she announced at the beginning of the semester, and she liked to point out how right she was about things at some point in every lesson. Books will always be burned, she said, and women are always second-class citizens, and history from the dawn of time has always swept in a westward circle around the globe.

I was daydreaming about Chinese ladies and their very small feet, about which we'd just been learning in social studies. I was fascinated by the pictures we'd seen, and had held on to the little cardboard shoe I'd made, though it was supposed to be drying on the windowsill with the others, so that I could turn it over and over in my hand. The angel was done up that day in the dress and skin of a Chinese girl—sometimes her form obliged my fancy, though I knew I could not control it, having tried to make her take on the shape of a dog or a corncob by staring at her and concentrating until she told me to stop it.

On little feet, crippled feet, she hobbled up to the front of the class when she heard Mrs. Khemlani talking about the grand sweep of history, a look on her face that I had learned to associate with anger over something stupid she'd just heard. I was used to getting lectures that no one else could hear, or having her place a hand on a book I was reading to say, "Listen, it was not so."

"Once, the most important city in the world was Nanking," Mrs. Khemlani was saying. "Then it was Athens and then it was Rome. Later it was Vienna and after that it was Paris and then London and then Boston and then New York. But, look here, now San Francisco is becoming most important, and where will it be after that? My husband says outer space, because he is an engineer and has a very scientific mind, but I say west, and so back to the East!"

Cindy Hacklight, my neighbor across the aisle, asked what this had to do with cowboys or Indians, but Mrs. Khemlani's response was drowned out for me by the angel's voice.

"Not so!" she shouted, stamping her foot at the head of the class, standing behind Mrs. Khemlani and growing out of her child's form. It was the first time I'd ever seen her in the guise of an adult, and she made herself huge. Her head scraped the ceiling and her wings spread from one end of the class to the other. "Not west!" she said, and pictures started to flash in her wings, men whispering in dark rooms, and soldiers at war, and tanks rolling through villages as they did in old newsreels, and people sitting quietly together. She had stopped saying words but her wings were certainly speaking to me, images were blazing out of the white depths and, more than that, feelings were radiating off them, so that I knew sadness and joy and rage and sourceless love together and in succession, the images and feelings a speech through which she communicated to me the true sweep of history. "It's toward you!" she said, unnecessarily, because she had already made me see myself as riding an enormous tide. Sitting at my desk, I could feel the relentless pressure of history under my feet, pushing me up through some mysterious medium toward a goal I could not describe except by its brightness, but I could see it in that moment very clearly. I leaped up from my desk, dropping my little torture shoe, and threw my hands above my head and gave my best up-with-people "Hooray!" I was eleven years old and thought I understood what the angel had in store for me, and felt sufficient to it in a way I can't comprehend now.

"Yes," said Mrs. Khemlani, who thought I was applauding her theory. "Hooray! Hooray for history!"

Better to be a garbageman than a doctor when your father gets sick. If I were a tree surgeon or a schoolteacher or a truffle-snuffler, or even a plain old junkie, then sickness would just be sickness, something to be borne and not something I was supposed to be able to defeat. For months, my sisters had wheedled me into meddling telephone consultations with my father's doctors, and I had pretended to understand what they were saying, and offered ungrounded opinions to them and to my sisters and my father. Even if I hadn't cheated my way through medical school, the task of recalling whatever I'd learned of pathology in my second year would have been beyond me. I make my living praising the beauty of well children. I love babies and I love ketamine, and that's really why I became a pediatrician, not because I hate illness or wanted to make anybody better, or believed that I could.

But nobody deducts the credit I deserve for being impaired and a fake. The doctors hear that you are a doctor and they enlist you in their hopeless task, forking over the greater portion of the guilt that is packaged with that hopeless task. The nurses hear that you are a doctor and immediately hate you for judging their work.

ACCOUNTING

"Oh, what the hell, I'll add another zero."

As it became more and more obvious day by day that my father was going to die, the angel, who has catalogued my every failing and should have known better, berated me for failing to save his life. It was the least I could do, she told me, because even this miracle is nothing compared with what I was supposed to grow up to achieve. And if I could do this then everything else would turn around. It was the first hope, besides death, she'd offered in a long time.

"He is not an enemy you can outwit," Mrs. Scott, one of my father's Tuesday chemotherapy buddies, said. He had got out of the hospital a week after I arrived home, and for another month I brought him back every week for his infusions. He would fall asleep during the infusion, and leave me alone to talk to her. He had told me that he hated the way she whored after hope—every week something else was going to save her life—and I'd have thought he was faking it just to escape her if I hadn't known firsthand the beautiful thick sleep that I.V. Benadryl can bring. Every session, she began by telling him about her latest discovery in the pages of *Prevention* or *Ayurvedic Weekly* or *High Colonic Fancy*, and five minutes into it he'd tell her that he felt oblivion pressing on his face, and five minutes after that his chin was on his chest and he was snoring more softly than he does in natural slumber. And, because I could not shut her up, I always suggested a game of checkers or cards or backgammon. Dr. Klar's infusion salon was packed with those sorts of diversions.

Most often, we played chess, a game that usually generated a lot of thoughtful silence—she'd put a finger to her temple and stare so hard at the board that I expected it to start vibrating in sympathy—but today she was distracted and a little agitated, maybe because she was getting steroids, or maybe because my angel was sitting so close to her, and despite her optimism she was getting sicker from week to week, and I swear that as they get closer to death people can start to feel the angel's ugly emanations.

"It's not a game of chess, you know," she continued, when I said nothing. "I think I just fully understood that right now."

"What's that?"

"You know," she said, putting her hand on her chest. Like my father, she had lung cancer. "Oncoloqatsi," she whispered. That was the name she had assigned to her disease, and she always whispered it, as if to speak his name too loud would be to summon strength to him.

"Oh, him," I said.

"I know it suggests a game, how you move and then he moves—you pick a chemo and he counters with a mutation, or you find the perfect herb to overcome him and he produces another measure of resistance, and the doctors play the game from organ to organ until your whole body is a board. They even doodle you up like one." She pulled down the neck of her blouse to show a piece of skin below her collarbone—it was just a cross to mark a target for radiation. "But this is only the surface. Look deeper, like I have, and you will see the truth."

"I think I've got you," I said, moving my bishop illegally. She didn't even look down.

"How often have I heard that from him? But he never has got me, and it's not because of my disciplined mind. It's because I have learned to resist him in the very marrow of my being. The very marrow, Doctor. It's not a lesson you would have learned in school, but I want you to learn it. I want your father to learn it. I have disciplined my soul against this enemy, and he must do it, too."

The angel sidled closer while Mrs. Scott was talking. She leaned over and took a sniff of the lady's turbaned head. "Three weeks," she said. And then she put her nose close to the shining skin of my father's forehead—every day his skin seemed to get a little thinner or stretch a little tighter, until I was sure that just the faintest rubbing pressure would reveal the dull white bone underneath—and said the same thing.

"Shut up!" I told her.

"It's hard to hear," Mrs. Scott said. "I know it's not your common wisdom, but you don't have to be rude." Dr. Klar came in before I could answer or apologize.

"Hallo, everybody!" she called out. Thirty years in southeast Florida had not dulled her accent much. This appealed to my father, who liked the fact that she was German, order and discipline having always added up to success in his life. Just being in sight of her immaculate white coat I felt accused of slovenliness and failure. "Here is the grandma of your better nature," the angel said the first time she saw her.

My father woke at the sound of her voice and smiled at her. "Charlotte?" he said. Soon after I took him home from the hospital, he started mistaking people and places, thinking that a nurse or some solicitous church lady was one of my sisters, or thinking that he was in his childhood home, in Chicago, calling out for a dog who had died sixty years ago. Me he never mistook for anyone else, though he often seemed surprised to see me. "Still here?" he said some mornings.

"It's Dr. Klar!" she said brightly. She said everything brightly, even things like "What's the use?" or "If he's alive in a month it will be a miracle." She was one of those oncologists who speak life out of one side of their mouth and death out of the other. For my father she had only good news, for me only bad.

"Darling," my father said, closing his eyes again and still smiling. "When is the baby coming?"

"Soon," she said. "The baby is fine. Everything is fine!" She reached out to pat his shoulder, but I caught her hand.

"The bad shoulder," I said. He had metastases all over his body, but his shoulder and his back bothered him the most. He nodded his head and fell back asleep.

"How is the pain, then?"

"Worse. And we're out of Percocet. He's out of Percocet."

"Easy enough to fix," she said.

"An ounce of meditation is worth a pound of Percocet," Mrs. Scott said.

"In certain traditions!" Dr. Klar said brightly, then she beckoned me out into the hall. "I think it's time to stop," she said.

"Stop what?"

"Stop hiding!" the angel shouted.

"Stop the chemo," Dr. Klar said. We had this conversation every week. "What are we doing? What good is coming of it? Why are you coming here every week, when he could be at home?"

"He doesn't want to stop. He wants to keep going."

"Just put out your hand to him and he will be healed," the angel said. "Just put out your hand to him and you will undo all the pain you've caused me."

"Does he know what he wants?" Dr. Klar asked.

"He's always confused here. You keep it too cold. And the Benadryl before the infusion makes him sleepy."

"Carl," she said, putting her hand on my shoulder the same way she did with him, comfort for someone who is already dead. "It really is getting to be time."

And the angel said, "It has always been time!"

Things started to go wrong between the angel and me after Cindy Hacklight showed me her pooty in seventh grade. Cindy had made a sort of cottage industry of showing her pooty to anyone—girl or boy—who would give her five dollars, a large sum back then, before high-school inflation. You got the sense that she didn't really care about the money but understood that what she had wasn't something to show for free.

"Go not that way," the angel said. She saved onerous fancy-speak like that for her most serious moments, for things she really meant, for things that really mattered. But I went with Cindy into the woods behind the gym, where she leaned against a narrow poplar and swore me not to secrecy but to respect for what she was about to show me. It was the one promise I've managed to keep all my life—I maintained my reverence for her bald little pooty then, in seventh grade, and ever after, even when I met it again one summer when we were both home from college. "Turn your face!" the angel shouted as Cindy lifted her skirt. And the angel was ugly for the first time, having put on the apricot face of our headmistress, Ms. Carnegie. I looked back and forth between them, startled by the contrast, how beautiful was the one and how ugly the other, until Cindy, holding her skirt up with one hand, put the other on my head and turned my face to her. "If you're going to respect it, you've got to look at it," she said.

The angel berated me for days afterward—how mild it seems in retrospect, compared with what she dished out in later years. "How is a seducing pooty like a grand destiny?" she kept asking me, and then she'd answer her own question, and eventually she trained me to give the right answer. "Exactly not at all," I said. Yet awakening lust wasn’t the problem, though eventually the lust that had awakened made me a monster and a fiend, and I would waste, and still waste, half my life in thrall to it, screwing whoever would hold still for me in high school and forever beyond, to the exclusion of work and food and sleep, though never drugs. I think it was the first time that something so ordinary had been as attractive to me as the extraordinary things the angel said I must dedicate myself to. When I lay with Cindy on the scented ground in my father’s orange groves, what I experienced was a very ordinary comfort, and when she raised her skirt in the woods I understood that I could want—so badly—something the angel thought I shouldn’t.

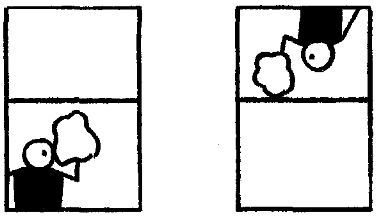
My father had a little bell that he rang when he wanted something. Mornings, I would hear it and rise from the single bed I’d slept in when I was a boy, and go downstairs to see what he wanted. At first, after he came home, it was to be helped out into the yard to sit in the sun, and then it was coffee or breakfast when he could not get those for himself, and then it was just to be turned or to retrieve a blanket that had migrated past his hips, and then finally he would just ring it and ring it as constantly as a beggar Santa, not knowing what he wanted, in which case I gave him a pain pill (and took one myself, always supremely faithful to my rigorous policy of one for you and one for me), and that would settle him.

Janie Finn was our hospice nurse. I always hated hospice and hospice people, nurses with smart heels and smother pillows, and the women in charge of the palliative-care programs, who seemed universally to be dark-eyed and dark-haired and very tall. They dressed like nineteenth-century Jesuits and cherished their crushes on death. But Janie brought me liquid morphine and Ativan—and either of those would be enough to make me forgive anybody a mere crime of being. “Your jab and your hook,” she said in the kitchen the day she met us. She had placed the bottles in my hand. I hadn’t even had any yet and already I could feel a lovely warmth coming out of them; they seemed to catch the afternoon light in a very special way. Janie set her feet and threw out two quick punches. “A one-two against the pain,” she said. “One-two! Give it a try.” With a bottle in each hand, I gave it a try, and, yes, my fists seemed to have a certain heft to them. I threw a punch at the angel and she actually ducked.

I made a lot of trips back and forth to the pharmacy, and imagined the little man in the back filling the bottles from two big coolers of bright, pure drug, and dreamed of following him back there to put my mouth to the spigots, because I was sure that if I could just ingest enough then the angel would be permanently transformed—and if it happened also to be enough to kill me, so be it. I was sure that she would take me someplace bearable. How she hated those little bottles.

“Just put out your hand,” the angel kept telling me. “Touch him and make him well.” Though she had hardly screeched at me in those last few days, it seemed like an even worse torture to have her demand the impossible of me so consistently, and to blame me for the fact that my father was getting sicker every day. It made me feel worse than anything she’d ever said to me. I could not ignore a homeless person on the street without her detailing the ways in which I was responsible for his misery, all those missing policies and initiatives, as if the hundred thousand sins of omission that were my unfulfilled destiny added up to national as well as individual catastrophe. It was easier to bear when she blamed me for the woes of strangers, even when those strangers fell out of the sky or burned in their churches. I could make little children faceless, but my father could never be anonymous to me, and as the weeks went by in Florida I believed her more than ever when she told me that every wrong thing I’d done could be redeemed in a single miracle, and that if I could make my father well with one hand then with the other I could do the same for the whole world.

“Make me dinner,” my father said, so I did. It was only three in the afternoon, but no matter what time of day it was, the meal was always dinner, and dinner was always the same thing: a chocolate milkshake with a banana and a raw egg and a little Ativan in it. When I brought it to him, he took a sip and he was done. He turned his head and opened his mouth like a baby bird—this was the signal for pain medication, so I took the morphine out of my pocket and squeezed in a few drops. He smacked his lips and turned back to the television, then closed his eyes. “Now I’ll take a nap,” he said. “Go to your room.”



I went outside instead. It was another brilliant blue afternoon. He kept saying he wanted a storm. We mostly watched television when he could stand to have me in the living room with him, and we always watched the weather. It was hurricane season, but all we’d had was near-misses. “Look at that!” he’d say, pointing at a gigantic storm swirling across the Atlantic, or he would shout “Fool!” at the hapless reporters clinging to light poles and declaiming the magnificently obvious. Hurricanes had been the enemy when I was a child—they tore up our trees and scattered the fruit. But now he spoke the names of the female hurricanes with great fondness.

Our nearest neighbor was a mile away, so nobody asked what I was doing when I hung the hurricane shutters on the living-room and kitchen windows, and my father asked no questions from inside. He slept so heavily now that a few times I thought he had already died. I nozzled up the hose and propped it so that it would spray on the shutters, and at dusk I turned it on. The angel was half ugly and half kind, because I was half stoned. “You play tricks on him when you should be calling him out of his bed.”

“It’s not a trick,” I said. I spent another few moments watching the sky and taking just the smallest nip of morphine and then went in. When I came into the living room with a candle, he asked what was going on. “A big storm,” I said.

“Finally!” he said.

We had a party during the storm, two more dinners and Ativan and morphine all around, and he was more alert for a while, telling me stories of hurricanes past, of ruined crops and toddlers surviving miraculously when a tornado stole them from their homes and deposited them in the next county.

“I know you have secrets,” he said suddenly. And then he said, “Your sister tried to drown you when you were two—do you remember?”

"No," I said, and asked him to tell me more. But then he thought I *was* my sister Carmen.

"How could you hurt a little baby like that?" he asked, and I said I'd done a lot of bad things.

"Tell me about it!" the angel said. I took another drop of morphine, right in front of my father, because his eyes were closed, but then as if he could smell it he opened his mouth, so I gave him some, too. And then I took some more, and gave him some more, and then switched to the Ativan. But still the angel was a harpy. "Put out your hand!" she said. "Another angel is coming!"

"It's all right," my father said. And then he whispered, "Your mother tried to smother him once. Just a little, with a blanket, and she told me about it right away. But she was depressed, and that's what you do when you're depressed."

"If you were a great man," the angel said, slurring now, "if you were President—and you could have been President—then I would be a national conscience!"

"Shut up," I said quietly to her, thinking that I had pitched my voice so that she'd hear it and he would not.

"Don't tell me to shut up, sassy girl!" he said, and I gave him some more morphine. Though he hadn't asked for it, he sucked at the dropper when I put it in his mouth.

"You can do it," she said, her face flashing beautiful for a moment. And she showed me how, putting out a hand that was soft and white on one side and hairy and rough on the other. She held it over his chest. "All you have to do is finally stop fucking up."

"You're ruining it," I told her, and took a swig of the Ativan, just a nip, really, but you are supposed to take it drop by drop and I knew why as soon as I took the swig. It was too good, and it made everything too beautiful, not just the angel, whose ugly skin flew off as if blown by a real hurricane, so that her wings were clean again and her naked face and body were open and compassionate. Even my father's face became beautiful, still yellow and sunken but now utterly lovely, and how strange to see a beautiful face that looked so much like my own. The room shone with something that was not light, and there really was a thrilling storm blowing outside and shaking the walls. Every so often, he would reach blindly for something not there in front of him, and he did this now, so I reached with him, and the angel reached, too, all three of us reaching out our hands together.

"You have to be ready at any time to have the conversation," Janie Finn had told me, meaning the conversation where you sorted everything out and said your goodbyes, and the dying person sorted everything out and lost all his regrets. "You talk about things and then you let go," she said, making an expansive gesture with her hands, as if she were setting free a bunch of doves or balloons. It was just the sort of thing hospice people always say.

Suddenly I thought that this must be the conversation, as we opened our mouths in turn and shared something important and lovely, and the whole room seemed like a great relief to me and I knew it must to him, too. The angel was struggling, though, seeming to wrestle with herself. Her face was beautiful but her body was ugly again, and my bottles were almost empty. My father's mouth was open, yet I took the last of the morphine myself and gave him a drop of water. He opened his eyes and looked at me and said it again—"You!"—and he shook his head, then closed his eyes again. But when I put my head on his chest he didn't push it away, and though one hand was reaching out blindly above him, he let me put the other on my neck. "I want a better angel, Dad," I told him. "That's all I need."

"I'll take a nap now," he said. "Batten down the hatches and go to your room." But I stayed where I was and took a nap myself. I woke up the next morning on the couch, the fake rain still drumming at the shuttered window, with no recollection of how I had got across the room. The angel was in the corner, her face ugly, but only in that way that all weeping faces are ugly. I sat down next to my father, who must have died very recently, because though his face was cold and his open eyes already had the look of spoiling grapes, his chest and his belly were warm. I put my hands on his chest, and my head on my hands, and stayed that way for a long time before I called Janie to tell her that it had happened. ♦

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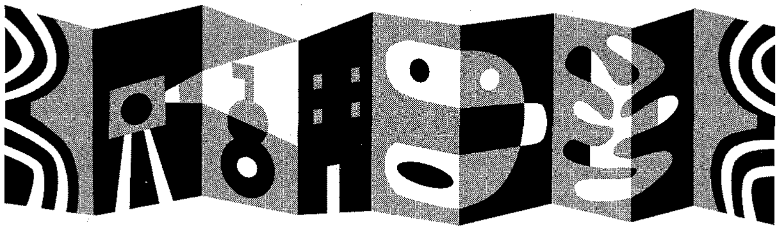

POP MUSIC

ON TOP

Mariah Carey's record-breaking career.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Mariah Carey is thirty-six years old, and, barring a debilitating illness, or another movie as bad as "Glitter," her 2001 vanity project, she will likely break the world record for the most No. 1 songs before she turns forty. The Beatles had twenty, and Carey is currently tied with Elvis Presley for second place, at seventeen.

She could almost break the record this year: her latest studio album—her tenth—"The Emancipation of Mimi," has what music professionals call "legs." It was the biggest-selling album of 2005—it has sold 5.5 million copies in the United States—and it has yielded two No. 1 songs: the gentle ballad "Don't Forget About Us" and "We Belong Together," an equally gentle but catchier number that held the No. 1 spot for fourteen weeks, longer than any other song so far this decade. There are two singles from "Mimi" on the radio right now, the hip-hop dance number "Say Somethin'" and the churchy vocal workout "Fly Like a Bird." If these songs don't take Carey to nineteen, she could still go on vacation for the next six months and finish the year with her résumé intact. She was the biggest-selling female artist of the nineties and is the first woman to have three studio albums sell more than eight million copies each in this country. She has written or co-written sixteen of her seventeen No. 1 hits, more than any other female composer, and has produced twelve No. 1 songs, more than any other woman.

Not all Carey's achievements are commercial, though: she co-wrote one of the few worthy modern additions to the holiday canon, the charming "All I Want for Christmas Is You" (from "Merry Christmas," of 1994, which also happens to be the best-selling Christmas album of all time, but never mind that). And when she sang her perky dance hit "Emotions" at the 1991 MTV Video Music Awards, she reportedly sounded a G-sharp three and a half octaves above middle C, one of the highest notes produced by a human voice in the history of recorded music. (Party poopers say that the note was actually an F-sharp.)

Carey's freakish vocal ability explains part of her appeal. In the same way that people went to a San Francisco Giants game in order to see Barry Bonds hit a home run, people buy Carey's records in order to hear her do things with her voice that no one else can do. Her first No. 1 song, "Vision of Love" (1990), made it clear that her instrument was the story—and it has remained so, through a celebrity marriage (to Tommy Mottola, then the chief of Sony Music), rumored breakdowns, and the public's obligatory obsession with her weight. Carey can sing lower notes, like an alto, and extremely high notes, like a coloratura soprano, which says something about her range but little about her style. The brutish purity of her voice places her in pop's theatrical lineage, in the company of singers like Barbra Streisand, but Carey's aesthetic is not Broadway, or even particularly white. She is essentially an R. & B. singer, steeped in gospel, soul, and, especially, hip-hop, and she is a master practitioner of melisma, a vocal technique that dates back to Gregorian chant and is common in African-American church singing.

Melisma describes the act of taking one syllable of a lyric and stretching it over several notes—or, in Carey's case, sometimes ten or twenty. "Vision of Love" is the Magna Carta of melisma. Whitney Houston popularized it, but Carey made melisma a required move for both R. & B. singers and contestants on "American Idol." (Five years ago, before a concert in Peoria, Illinois, Beyoncé Knowles told me that she started doing vocal "runs" after hearing "Vision of Love.") The song is a florid composition that expresses the philosophy that Carey has disseminated profitably for sixteen years: love will triumph and everything will be all right. (As she puts it in the song: "I had a vision of love, and it was all that you turned out to be.") It begins with several bars of lovely, wordless melisma, as if Carey were warming up, and it ends with two very loud passages of melisma, one of them an a-cappella expansion on the word "all" that can be roughly transcribed as: "ah-ha-uh-uh-oh-oo-oh-ooah-ha-uh-uh-oh-oo-oh-oo-ah-oh."

Calisthenics are only one aspect of "Vision of Love," however. The chord changes, which are played on electric piano, are reminiscent of early Billy Joel—obvious, consonant, and rich. Carey's sound changes with nearly every line, mutating from a steely tone to a vibrating growl and then to a humid, breathy coo. The melisma is what people remember about the song, like a ninth-inning grand slam, but that's not what made it a hit. Carey, who co-wrote it, knew that the singing should bob and weave while the verses move toward a climax—the words are secondary.

Carey couldn't have succeeded simply by persuading people that she was a craftsman. Her big ballads—"Vision of Love," along with No. 1 bromides like "Thank God I Found You" and "My All"—appeal to people who otherwise don't listen to pop. These are people who probably also like Andrea

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Carey established R. & B. as the sound of pop and made melisma a requirement on "American Idol."

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Bocelli and Céline Dion, singers who avoid the sexual tug of the blues and the glorious noises of rock and hip-hop in favor of tremulous expressions of chaste emotion. Yet Carey, more than any other musician, established R. & B. and hip-hop as the sound of pop. One of her frothiest and most delightful No. 1 hits was "Dreamlover" (1993), which features a loop of The Emotions' 1971 soul tune "Blind Alley," a song made famous by the rapper Big Daddy Kane, who sampled it in his 1988 track "Ain't No Half-Steppin'." Beginning in 1995, rappers started performing guest verses on Carey's songs. Suddenly, people who would cross the street to avoid listening to hip-hop were bringing rappers into their house, under the cover of Carey. It became standard for R. & B. stars, like Missy Elliott and Beyoncé, to combine melodies with rapped verses. And young white pop stars—including Britney Spears, 'N Sync, and Christina Aguilera—have spent much of the past ten years making pop music that is unmistakably R. & B.

Among Carey's best and strangest collaborations with a rapper was a remix of her song "Fantasy," in 1995. After it was already No. 1, she invited Ol' Dirty Bastard, from the Wu-Tang Clan, to rhyme over the song, which is built around a sample of the chirping 1981 track "Genius of Love," by the Tom Tom Club. (Carey has often described herself as an "eternal twelve-year-old," an assertion borne out by her enthusiasm not just for rainbows, butterflies, and glitter—all of which appear on her album covers—but for the songs that were actually on the radio when she was a teenager.) Carey's sunny world view is a perfect match for the Tom Tom Club's twinkling keyboards; Ol' Dirty Bastard, on the other hand, who died of a drug overdose in 2004, was the last person you would imagine hiring for such a sanguine track, and the dissonance is entertaining. "Me and Mariah go back like babies with pacifiers," he begins his verse. At the end of the song, Carey coos about her "lucky boyfriend" while Ol' Dirty growls "sweet baby" behind her; he sounds drunk, as though he might fall over. (Ol' Dirty is apparently not the lucky boyfriend, but Mariah seems to like him anyway.)

"The Emancipation of Mimi" includes no songs as effortlessly cheery or as durable as "Dreamlover" and "Fantasy," partly because Carey's melodies now meander, in keeping with current trends in R. & B., and have lost the clarity that pop demands. "Mimi" is Carey's most thoroughly R. & B. record; even the big ballads are in the "slow jam" vein and have little to do with Las Vegas, opera, or doo-wop. There are only a couple of Hallmark duds to skip over; you can enjoy Carey's expansive vocalisms without begrudging her moments of brassy self-affirmation.

In some ways, Carey resembles U2, another veteran act currently having extraordinary success late in a long career. ("How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb," the group's most recent release, won the Grammy for best album of 2005 and has sold three million copies in the United States.) Both acts have left experimentation to their juniors and are sticking to what they do best. In the case of U2, this means using the heavy rhythms and glassy guitar sound that first gained the band notice, in the early eighties. In Carey's case, this means singing R. & B. but without the scenery-inhaling ballads that helped her sell millions of copies. Her decision largely to omit those ballads from "Mimi" is commercially gutsy—if multimillionaires can be gutsy—and it makes sense. The album's songs were produced by a host of people, including Jermaine Dupri, Kanye West, and the Neptunes, who have been guiding R. & B. and hip-hop during the past few years. Carey, having proved that she has the lungs of an opera singer, is now making the music that she has always listened to. Her idea of pairing a female songbird with the leading male m.c.s of hip-hop changed R. & B. and, eventually, all of pop. Although now anyone is free to use this idea, the success of "Mimi" suggests that it still belongs to Carey. ♦

DEPT. OF STRAIGHT THINKING

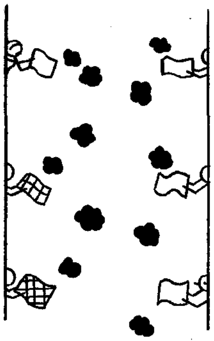
From CNNMoney.com.

The latest Census Bureau report shows median prices for new residences sold in December fell 1.5 percent from the previous month to $221,800. Half of the homes sold for more than the median, the rest for less.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Abide with Me, *by Elizabeth Strout (Random House; $24.95).* The handsome minister Tyler Caskey, of West Annett, Maine, is beloved by his parishioners because he really *does* think they're all God's children. But in the bleak autumn of 1959, more than a year after the death of his wife, Tyler is still awash in grief. The man who once held them rapt from the pulpit now appears ridiculous up there—"like a big tractor being driven by a teenage kid, slipping in and out of gear"—and his daughter has started screaming and spitting in kindergarten. How can he lead them if he himself is lost? Just as she did in her first novel, "Amy and Isabelle," Strout has created an absorbing world peopled by characters who argue the merits of canned cranberry sauce and using one's turn signal; meanwhile, dark fears about Freud and Khrushchev run beneath the surface of their lives like water under ice. With superlative skill, Strout challenges us to examine what makes a good story—and what makes a good life.

The Big Why, *by Michael Winter (Bloomsbury; $24.95).* Winter's spartan novel re-creates an episode in the life of the American artist Rockwell Kent, who, in 1914, left New York City for Brigus, Newfoundland, a bleak hamlet populated by fishermen, seal hunters, and an Arctic explorer. Kent, known in Manhattan as much for his temper and his philandering as for his woodcuts, wanted to lie low, and spent the winter hunkered down in a pup tent on the second floor of a freezing borrowed house. Before long, Kent began to attract suspicion as a possible German spy. (Among other things, he professed a love of German music and wrote "Bomb Shop" in Gothic letters on his studio door.) The next year, he was deported. Winter, who grew up in Newfoundland, creates a frugal voice for Kent's conversations with himself—ornery, reflective, intimate, lewd—and in doing so constructs an indelible portrait of the artist as outsider.



Chances Are. . ., *by Michael Kaplan and Ellen Kaplan (Viking; $26.95).* This fascinating layman's trek through probability theory, from its roots in dice games in the seventeenth century to its role in modern-day thermodynamics, tackles humanity's innate need to seek order in even the most chaotic phenomena. The authors, a mother-and-son team, address simple problems (How many shuffles make a deck of cards truly random? At least seven) and more complex ones (Can time move backward? Yes, but it's unlikely). They do not avoid mathematical equations, but both have backgrounds in the humanities, and their sense of whimsy—"Once you know that daisies usually have an odd number of petals, you can get anyone to love you"—allows them to draw stimulating conclusions.

The Secret History of Domesticity, *by Michael McKeon (Johns Hopkins; $60).* This colossal study, nearly nine hundred pages long, by the author of the influential "The Origins of the English Novel," attempts to show how, in English culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the relationship of public and private, once a tacit distinction, became an explicit and acknowledged separation. McKeon's division between "distinction" and "separation" may seem arbitrary, but the strength of the book lies in the wealth of historical, literary, and pictorial examples that evoke the texture of domesticity, from bedchambers to bigamy. McKeon's vigorous command of detail, evinced in passages on subjects like the dangers of hoopskirts and the origin of the cookbook, is sometimes obscured by a love of abstraction. The book is most successful when least general, and its final third—an engaging and briskly paced analysis of "secret histories," romans à clef, and the domestic novel—could perhaps have been published as a separate volume.

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BOOKS

THE GOD PROJECT

What the science of religion can't prove.

BY H. ALLEN ORR

Scientists have championed an astonishing variety of views on religion, ranging from the outright hostile to the deeply devout. Even among evolutionary biologists, whose views might seem the most predictable, matters have been surprisingly complex. Richard Dawkins, the author of "The Selfish Gene" and many other popular books on evolution, has in recent years become something of a professional atheist, arguing that "faith is one of the world's great evils." The late paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould, on the other hand, argued in his book "Rocks of Ages" that science and religion can and should coexist. Science has its proper domain of activity, religion has its domain, and each must refrain from interfering with the other.

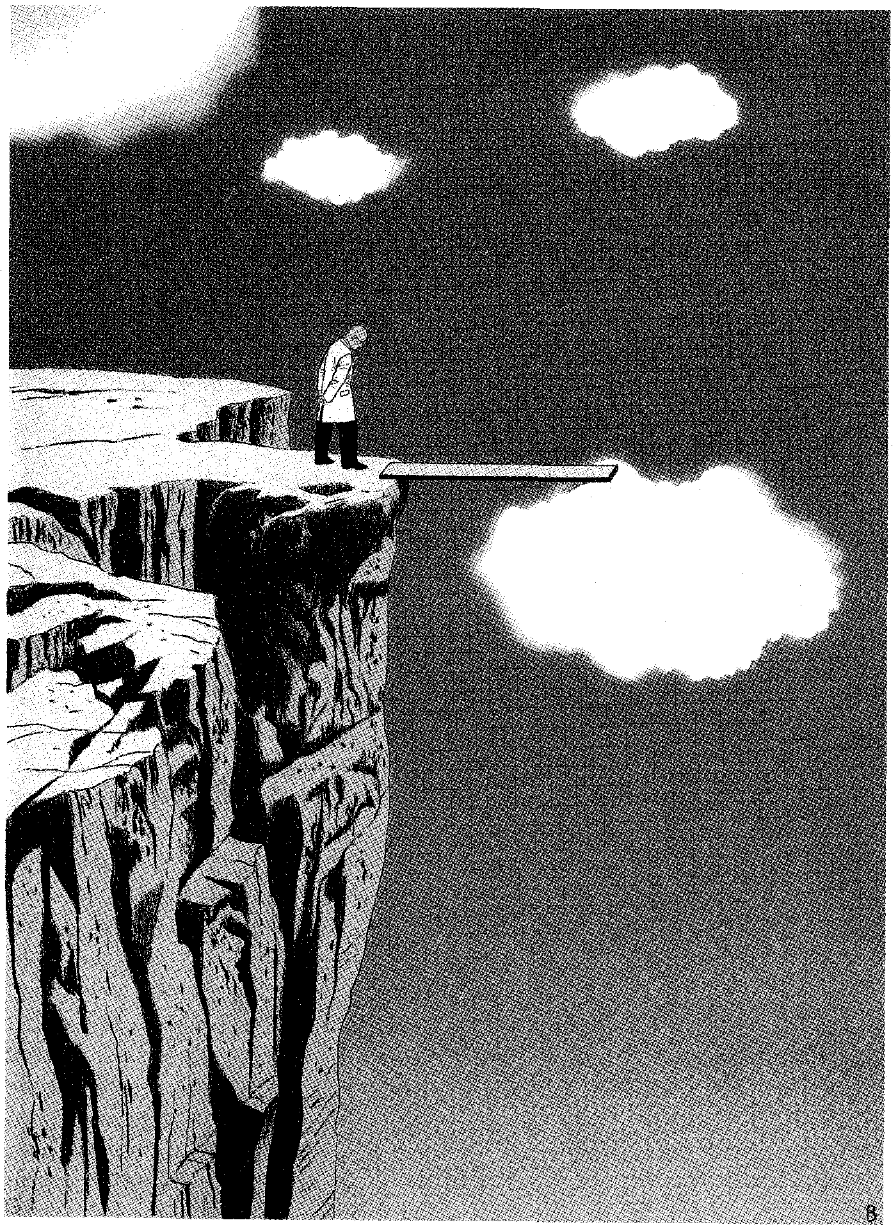
The religious opinions of scientists are, of course, a separate matter from a science of religion. And yet, whatever else religion may be, it's something that happens in the real world in real time. So why not approach it as a natural process? Why not study it scientifically? This is the task that Daniel Dennett sets for himself in his ambitious new book, "Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon" (Viking; $25.95). Dennett, a philosopher, is steeped in science, especially evolutionary biology, and he has written several books and articles with a Darwinian focus. In the most popular of them, "Darwin's Dangerous Idea," Dennett proclaimed that natural selection is "the single best idea anyone has ever had" and argued that Darwinism is a universal theory that helps to explain not only the deep history of life but the twists and turns of human cultural change. Given his enthusiasm for all things evolutionary, and given that he calls himself a "godless philosopher," you might expect "Breaking the Spell" to be an extended exercise in debunking belief. It is not—at least, not ostensibly. Dennett's approach to religion is reasonably respectful, though a certain bombast breaks through now and then. Writing for a general audience, Dennett insists that he wants to engage religious readers in a rational discussion, not turn them away.

"Breaking the Spell" ranges widely, perhaps too widely. It surveys the state of religion in contemporary America, considers whether believers are happier or more moral than nonbelievers, discusses the rise of modern nondenominational spirituality, and briefly reviews the purported philosophical proofs for the existence of God. But all these topics have been widely discussed, and Dennett has little new to say about them; his real contribution is an accessible account of what might be called the natural history of religion. (Religion, as he provisionally defines it, involves believing in, and seeking the approval of, a supernatural being.) "There was a time," he writes, "when there was no religion on this planet, and now there is lots of it. Why?" Why did religion appear in the first place? And why did certain religions spread while others sank into obscurity?

To answer these questions, Dennett says, we must confront two spells. The first is the taboo against asking uncomfortable questions about religion. In his view, religion is simply too important to be spared hard questions. Indeed, he argues, religion is among the most powerful forces on earth and, as religiously inspired warfare and acts of terrorism remind us, it is not always benign. The second spell, in Dennett's account, is one cast by religion itself. Do we risk dimming religion's numinous glow by the very act of scientific analysis? Will we, out of what Dennett calls a "pathological excess of curiosity," rob believers of the deepest and most important part of their lives? Dennett is sensitive to this concern and concedes the danger, but he concludes that the chances of undermining religious sensibility are slight. He assures his readers that one can approach religion as a natural phenomenon without, for example, prejudging the question of God's existence. Indeed, it is entirely possible that a scientific analysis might reveal religious phenomena that can't be explained by natural means. Dennett maintains that a scientific study of religion does not exclude the possibility that religious beliefs are true. Whether the results of such a study will provide any support for religion is, of course, another matter.

According to Dennett, the earliest stages of religion were likely characterized by speculations about supernatural or quasi-natural beings. These questions arose out of an aspect of human nature we take for granted: the recognition that the world contains not only other bodies but also other minds. We recognize, in other words, that the world includes "agents," independent minds that possess their own sets of beliefs and desires. This recognition allows us a wide range of cognitive moves and countermoves presumably unavailable to most other species: "I know he thinks that I have a stone in my hand." The ability to attribute agency is, Dennett says, almost surely an evolutionary adaptation. It is probably encoded genetically in our species (no one taught you that other minds populate the planet), and it plays a key role in everything from fighting ("He doesn't know that I dropped the stone") to seduction ("Would you like to see my cave paintings?"). But its appearance during evolution led to an unexpected possibility: attributing agency where no agent exists. Human beings are skilled at positing agents—whispering winds, turnip ghosts, and monsters under the bed—for which the evidence is less than overwhelming, and this tendency might explain why nearly all peoples talk about creatures like elves and goblins. As Dennett acknowledges, however, this tendency falls short of explaining full-blown religion. Elves are the stuff of superstition, not of belief systems attended by elaborate social strictures, rituals, and theologies.

Explaining the emergence of real religion requires a different kind of approach, and here things get complicated. A mind-boggling number of explanations, some biological and some economic, have been introduced over the past decade or so. One was championed by the evolutionary theorist David Sloan Wilson in his 2002 book, "Darwin's Cathedral." Wilson suggested that religion is a kind of adaptation that evolved by "multilevel selection." Most biologists think that evolution is propelled by natural selection at one level only: among competing individuals. A polar bear that was whiter than its peers, say, could sneak up undetected on potential prey more often than darker bears could, and was thus likelier to survive and leave more progeny. Assuming that the difference between whiter and darker bears was due to a difference in genes, the genes for whiter bears would grow more common and those for darker bears less so.



Could a scientific study of religious faith undermine the central claims of religion itself?

GUY BILLOUT

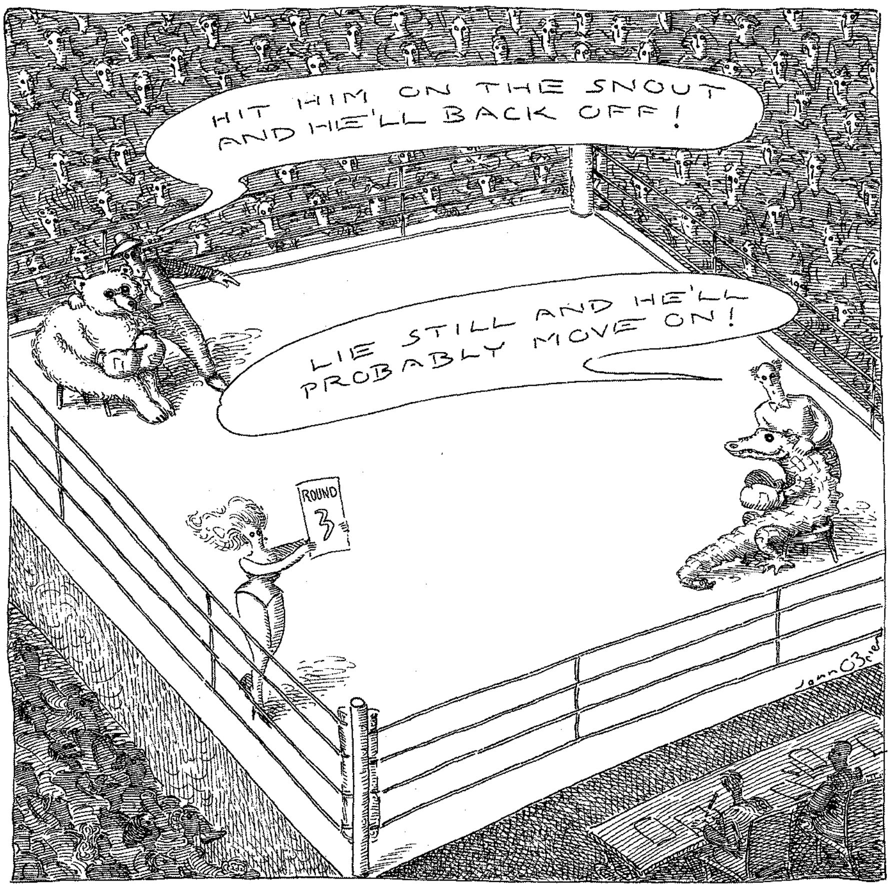
According to Wilson, though, evolution sometimes involves natural selection among competing *groups* of individuals. Consider "predator inspection" in guppies. If a potential predator approaches a school of guppies, one or two fish may peel away from the group, inspect the intruder, and then (if their luck holds) return to the school, reporting on the danger. Predator inspection is paradoxical. Why would a guppy take on such a risky assignment? Why be an altruist? Group selection provides a possible answer. Predator inspection might evolve not because inspectors leave more progeny than non-inspectors *within* a group—traditional individual selection—but because groups that include inspectors survive better than groups that don't. Although Wilson doesn't think that all evolution involves group selection, he thinks that group selection plays a big enough role that a realistic theory of evolution must allow for both individual and group selection.

Applying this theory to our own species, Wilson argued that religion is an adaptation of human groups in the same way that the heart is an adaptation of human individuals. Religion is, in his account, a collection of beliefs and behaviors that brings people together, coördinates their activities, and, in the end, allows groups to accomplish tasks that would otherwise be impossible. If my group's religion is better at this than yours, my group and its religion will spread and yours will recede. Wilson suggested, for instance, that the early Christian Church succeeded against all odds because its creed of selflessness provided its adherents with a sort of welfare state. Christians banded together, aiding each other through illness, famine, and war. The resulting biological edge, he thinks, played a part in the unexpected success of this once obscure mystery cult.

In "Breaking the Spell," Dennett tentatively proposes another theory that, like Wilson's, involves natural selection with a twist. Under Wilson's theory, the beneficiaries of natural selection are groups of human beings. Under Dennett's, the beneficiaries are religious "memes." A meme, a term introduced by Richard Dawkins, is any idea or practice—any thought, song, or ritual—that can replicate from one brain to another. When you whistle a jingle from a commercial, it's because the jingle meme has successfully replicated and now resides in a new brain, yours. According to Dennett, memes let us lift Darwinism from its historical base in biology to the realm of human culture. The meme, he says, may underlie cultural evolution in the same way the gene underlies biological evolution. Just as some genes grow more common and others less common, so some memes grow more common ("You're fired!") and others less common ("Is that your final answer?"). Dawkins often thought of memes as mental viruses, selfish parasites on human minds; Dennett, by contrast, emphasizes that they can be benign, or even good for their hosts.

Bringing the nascent science of "memetics" to bear on religion, Dennett goes on to argue that religious memes that encourage group solidarity might outcompete memes that are less adept at encouraging solidarity, especially when human survival depends on coöperation. His reasoning is that the success of a coöperative group is great advertising for that group's memes. To take a secular example, liberal Western ideas like democracy and free markets might spread not because other nations are persuaded by principled arguments in favor of these ideas but because Western nations survive and prosper, which prompts others to emulate them. If you find it hard to believe that the beneficiaries of religion aren't human beings but the memes they carry, Dennett asks you to consider what Christians themselves claim to value more than their lives: the Word. "Spreading the Word of God is their *summum bonum*, and if they are called to forgo having children and grandchildren for the sake of spreading the Word, that is the command they will try hard to obey." Dennett also argues that you can help a religion grow even if you don't believe in God. People can become conscious stewards of memes they happen to consider benevolent, and, in the case of religion, the result might be a bloodless "belief in belief." People who aren't sure about God may nonetheless be sure that religion is good for society and so encourage its spread.

Finally, Dennett describes a recent theory according to which the spread of religions reflects the action not of Charles Darwin's natural selection but of Adam Smith's invisible hand. As the rational-choice theorists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke argued in their book "Acts of Faith" (2000), human beings, when confronted with imperfect information, behave in a way that is generally rational. So if you believe (rightly or wrongly) that there is a God, it can be perfectly rational for you to engage in exchange with this well-heeled partner (even if the commodity you most desire can be delivered only post mortem). Stark and Finke are not, then, so much concerned with why people believe in God as with how believers act and why religious institutions spread. Their key claim is that churches mediate the complex exchanges between mortals and their gods. People go to church, in other words, for much the same reason they hire a real-estate agent: when something important is at stake in a complex transaction, it pays to get professional help.


HIT HIM ON THE SNOUT AND HE'LL BACK OFF!
LIE STILL AND HE'LL PROBABLY MOVE ON!
ROUND 3

This theory may explain, as a corollary, why a larger percentage of Americans attend church than do, say, Western Europeans. The reason, according to Stark and Finke, is that Americans enjoy a free market in religion. While we have more than a thousand denominations, Europeans often have centrally planned state religions that put barriers in the way of competition and provide little in the way of diverse religious products. "The American religious economy," Stark and Finke conclude, "surpasses Adam Smith's wildest dreams about the creative forces of a free market."

So what has the science of religion shown? Why did religion appear and why did certain religions spread while others vanished? Surprisingly, Dennett doesn't claim to know the answers, and he picks no winners among the accounts he surveys, including his own. Scientists, he says, have provided us with a reasonable "family of proto-theories," but we have little basis for choosing among its members. This conclusion, though disappointing, is, I think, correct. The incipient science of religion faces at least two problems. The first is that some of the theories offered so far, especially the evolutionary ones, invoke processes or entities that are controversial even outside the context of religion. Many evolutionists are skeptical about Wilson's idea of group selection, for instance, even when considering guppies, much less Jonah and the whale. One reason is that natural selection at the individual level will typically overwhelm selection at the group level: because individuals are born and die faster than groups reproduce or go extinct, evolution will usually move in the direction preferred by individual selection. (The behavior of those guppies can also be explained without group selection, via a theory called reciprocal altruism—a version of "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.")

Similarly, many evolutionary biologists dismiss memes and memetics as little more than pseudoscientific wordplay. For one thing, the analogy between genes and memes is notoriously weak. Genes mutate rarely; memes mutate rapidly. Genes are digital (they're made of DNA, which is made of four distinct chemicals); memes aren't. Nor has memetics produced any persuasive explanations of previously unexplained phenomena. Though Dennett maintains that his theory requires only a modest, "sober" version of memes, and though he properly takes to task those enthusiasts who believe that they possess a robust science, his account of religion nonetheless turns on an entity that many scientists don't believe in. The existence of a God meme is no better established than the existence of God.

Another problem with choosing among the existing theories is empirical, not theoretical. At the moment, we don't have the data that might allow us to reject one theory and endorse another. The critical question is whether there is hope for progress. Here Dennett seems far too easy on his enterprise. "Breaking the Spell" is rife with claims about the testability of these new theories, and certainly each theory allows some predictions. Stark and Finke's, in particular, has made, and stood up to, a number of them. But progress will require predictions that are testable in the real world and that also distinguish among the various theories. Just what predictions let us determine whether religion spread by selection among groups of human beings or by selection among the memes these groups happened to carry? Dennett doesn't say, and it's hard to imagine what the answer would look like. Near the end of his book, he merely asserts that "getting down to specifics and generating further testable hypotheses is work for the future." But the origin and diffusion of religion, like the origin and diffusion of music, laughter, and xenophobia, reside in a largely irretrievable evolutionary past. We know virtually nothing about the religion, if any, practiced by our ancestors on the African savanna hundreds of thousands of years ago. It's far from obvious that explaining unprovable beliefs with unprovable theories constitutes progress.

Even if a science of religion could reach firm conclusions, what would it mean for religion itself? Exactly what would follow for the faithful? At one extreme, the Dawkinses of the world argue that a scientific accounting of the origin and evolution of religious memes should destroy belief. At the other, the Goulds argue that, because science and religion have separate provinces, no proper scientific finding can touch religion.

Neither of these extremes seems tenable. It would be naïve to deny that science can inform, and sometimes challenge, our view of religion. To take a trivial example, perhaps the earliest finding from the natural history of religion was that different peoples appeal to different gods. Any honest Christian or Jew must admit that, had he been born half a world away, he'd be an honest Hindu or Buddhist. This finding suggests at least some adjustment to more innocent views of the inevitability of one's faith. But believers often seem happy to make these sorts of adjustments and remain perfectly faithful. For some people, the spell cast by religion seems to have less to do with the particular claims made by a particular tradition than with larger metaphysical claims: the universe has a purpose, God exists, or life is sacred. So the more serious question is whether a science of religion—indeed, whether science in general—can undermine these sorts of beliefs.

Science can certainly undermine particular factual claims made by religion (the universe was created in six days), but it's far less clear that it can challenge religion's general metaphysical claims (the universe has a purpose). To insist on this distinction is to recognize what it means for something to be a metaphysical, not a physical, claim. What experiment could prove that the universe has no purpose? To suppose that a kind of physics can demolish a kind of metaphysics is to commit what philosophers call a category mistake. Dennett is right to emphasize that his scientific analysis doesn't require us to prejudge religion's metaphysical claims, but that's only half the story. It doesn't let us *post*-judge them, either.

This point is connected to a distinction often made by philosophers of science between "methodological naturalism" (science is a set of approaches to the world in which only naturalistic explanations may be considered) and "metaphysical naturalism" (science describes the ultimate state or meaning of the world). As many philosophers and scientists argue, the first approach doesn't justify the second. Science, they claim, is not in the business of issuing position papers on metaphysics.

It's remarkably hard to tell if Dennett would agree with that conclusion. Indeed, this is one of the more frustrating aspects of "Breaking the Spell." To the religious reader, after all, this is probably the only issue that matters. Dennett's relative neglect of it is particularly surprising given that some of the scholars he discusses are so unequivocal on the subject. Stark and Finke, for example, state that any conclusion about whether religion is true or false is "beyond science." They simply hope to study "the relationship between human beings and what they experience as divine," and science, they say, can "examine any aspect of that relationship except its authenticity."

Dennett's apparent reluctance to say what can, and cannot, follow logically from a science of religion would seem to be more than mere oversight. Although Dennett takes great pains early in his book to assure his readers that they needn't question the validity of religion to join in his analysis, it's clear that he hopes they will ultimately render a judgment. And it's equally clear what he hopes that judgment will be. ("Many readers . . . will see me as just another liberal professor trying to cajole them out of some of their convictions, and they are dead right about that—that's what I am and that's exactly what I'm trying to do.")

None of this is to say that Dennett's preferred outcome is wrong. Religious beliefs, including those abstract ones having little relation to any particular tradition, may well be mistaken. But it seems clear that any such conclusion must come from someplace other than science. Of course, even if a line can be drawn between physics and metaphysics, it wouldn't make all our difficulties disappear. Religion is much more than a collection of transcendental and untestable assertions. It's also a potent social and political force and, like any such force, it is sometimes prone to excess. The result is the usual roster of ills: intolerance, fanaticism, and, yes, terrorism. But it seems doubtful that solutions to these problems will emerge from anyone's laboratory. ♦

BOOKS

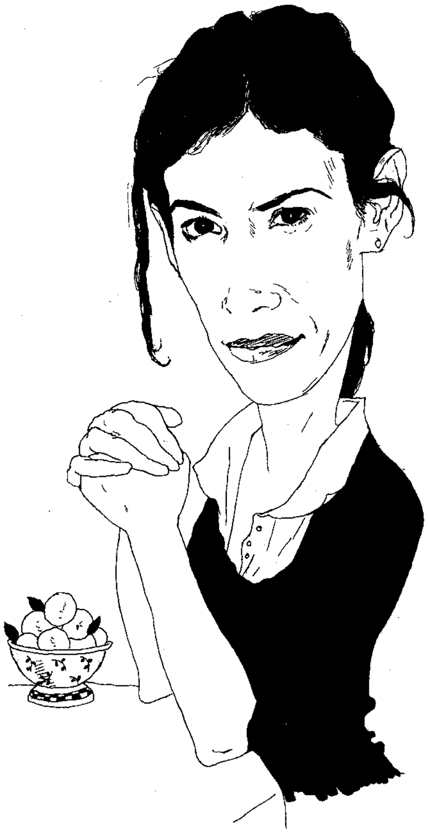
BIG RIVER

In eighteenth-century Brooklyn, a girl has a dream.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Where do the dead go? Prudence Winship, the heroine of Emily Barton's beautiful second novel, "Brookland" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25), decided around the age of six that she had the answer. The year was 1778. Prue lived in Brooklyn, where her father owned a gin distillery. She was an only child, and dark-minded. But in those days, as she tells us, looking back on her youth, you didn't have to have a morbid cast of mind to think about death. For years, British soldiers, affable boys, had been camped in Brooklyn; they vanished daily. Fevers swept through the village, taking mothers, children. "It seemed," Prue says, "I saw the dead as often as I saw the living . . . their hands slack, their skin oaty as dishwater." The young Prue's recreation is to sit on the bluff below her father's distillery and think about this. She looks at the big East River and at the island on the other side, Manhattan. And slowly it dawns on her. The inhabitants of that island are crowded; unlike Brooklynites, they live stacked up in three- and four-story buildings. Every day, barges leave Brooklyn to bring them food and drink. These people have insatiable hungers, as Prue has heard is the case with the damned. So that's the answer. When you die, you go to Manhattan.

Soon after this epiphany, Prue's mother becomes pregnant, and Prue, who wants no rivals, begs God to kill the child. The baby is born, but with a defect in her vocal cords. "She could emit no sound but a rasping sigh, such as a person makes choking on a fishbone"—a condition that Prue is sure she caused by her curse. She suffers for it, in any case. Pearl, as the new daughter is called, can never be left alone, because if she were in danger she could not cry out, so Prue is assigned to shadow her every step. She comes to love this tiny, intelligent, black-eyed sister, but, in some corner of her mind, she also hates her, because Pearl's handicap reminds her of the evil in her own heart. Pearl, she writes, "showed stealth in hunting down the eggs of the fractious hen who laid outside her box, and was of great assistance in chasing the motley-patterned, six-toed kittens who roamed our yard; but I could not have explained to her how when I caught them, I was entranced by the way their hearts beat fast within their delicate ribs, or how I wished I could cut one open, to lay bare the clockwork within." The world is nice and normal—chickens and eggs—but it also has six-toed kittens that Prue would happily cut open. Pearl, too, is a six-toed kitten whom Prue has wished to harm. Therefore, she watches over her, night and day, with anxious care.



Emily Barton

This knot of mixed feelings between Prue and Pearl is the emotional center of the novel, and the mechanism that sets off its hair-raising dénouement, but in "Brookland" everything is mixed. Pearl is not just a dear little damaged creature. She is also an eerie character, like Hester Prynne's Pearl, after whom I assume Barton named her. As the adult Prue sits over her paperwork at night, Pearl, in her rocking chair—*creak, creak*—does her needlework, which is about the only occupation her family will allow her. The piece she is working on is a Pietà for the local Catholic church, "with a sad, green-faced Virgin bending over her even sadder gray son." Prue, at her worktable, is living in what she thinks is the real world. Pearl, unnoticed, at her back, is weaving a different story.

To match the sisters' feelings, the book's narrative strategies are divided. Sometimes the speaker is an omniscient narrator; elsewhere, it is Prue, in 1822—aged fifty—writing to her daughter. The omniscient narrator uses a slightly old-fashioned English and sticks to the story. Prue's language is more archaic (people wear "cloaths," discuss "topicks") and also more leisurely, expansive, in the nineteenth-century epistolary manner. Correspondingly, we get two different angles on reality. At times, the book is like a scientific treatise. When Prue is taken into the family business, we learn so much about gin distilling that—as with glove-making in Philip Roth's "American Pastoral" or auto assembly in Jeffrey Eugenides' "Middlesex"—we feel we could go out and do it ourselves. And, as in those other books, the industry is explicitly tied to social history. We hear about the cypresses that used to grow on the bluff but are there no more, because the wood was needed to make gin casks. Barton means, in part, to give us a real chronicle of Brooklyn, and of America, at the time of independence. Her characters have names that, if you know Brooklyn, you'll recognize: Schermerhorn, van Nostrand, Joralemon, Boerum. Often, however, the facts aren't straight. Like the village in the Hebrides that was the setting for Barton's first novel, "The Testament of Yves Gun-

ANDY FRIEDMAN

dron," the Brooklyn of "Brookland" is in some measure an imaginary city, out of Calvino or Borges.

And reality, though it dominates, is intermittently pierced by fantasy and dream. The first instance is Prue's vision of Manhattan as the isle of the dead. Nine chapters into the book, this image undergoes a huge, drums-pounding amplification, in a dream that Prue has on the eve of her twenty-sixth birthday. She imagines that she is piloting a canoe across the river, to Manhattan. And who is the dead soul she is transporting? Pearl, with her hair on fire and with blood gushing out of her mouth. Prue is horrified, but Pearl is not. Heedlessly spilling gore down her dress front, Pearl points upward, over Prue's shoulder. Prue turns and looks, and what she sees is a bridge, a huge, beautiful bridge, between Brooklyn and Manhattan.

That bridge is the subject of the rest of the novel. In reality, the East River was not spanned until 1883, with the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge, the work of an accomplished engineer, John Augustus Roebling, and his son Washington. But, in "Brookland," Prue—a woman in her twenties, self-educated—decides, almost a century earlier, to build a single-span bridge over the river. Barton does everything in her power to make us accept this as a plausible scenario. She shows us Prue poring over treatises, consulting experts, building models, enlisting the help of her fiancé, Ben, who is a surveyor. We are taken to Albany for the debate over the funding. We visit the work sites, and learn about levers and abutments and voussoirs. Slowly, the bridge does come to seem real.

Yet nothing can prevent this proud construction from soaring up into another realm. Apart from the bridge, the primary subject of "Brookland" is family love, which for the people in this novel is an aching, physical business. They hug each other (too much), sit in each other's lap, play with each other's hair. Both of Prue's parents die from grief over the loss of another member of the household. The father's death is especially wrenching. He was the person Prue loved best, and who believed in her. Packing to go to Albany, she gets his old trunk down from the attic. When she opens it, she can smell him, and she longs to crawl into the trunk and lie there, joined with him again. So the bridge, which Prue and Ben propose to the legislature as a spur to commerce, is far more than that. It is Prue's challenge to mortality. By now, she knows that the dead don't go to Manhattan. Still, they must go somewhere. How might she reach her father, even symbolically? How, by an act of her mind, could she rise over death—and sin, too, the sin of her curse on Pearl—and arrive on the other side?

God once promised a way of transcending sin and death. Prue's parents, good children of the Enlightenment, told her to forget that nonsense. Behind their backs, she sneaked off to church. Her heart "called out to God," but he never seemed to answer. The bridge, in its joint action of rising and uniting, is her attempted solution. Arc-shaped—Prue modelled it on a springboard—it is repeatedly compared to the rainbow with which God, after the flood, signalled his covenant with man. Barton means us to see Prue's maneuver as that of the nineteenth century in general, its replacement of religion with science and industry. She may also be thinking of something more specific. If I had to bet, I would say that this book—which was probably begun around 2001 ("Yves Gundron" was published in 2000), and which has to do with a high, hubristic construction, dedicated to secular ideals, that is attacked in an almost Biblical act of vengeance—contains some thought of the World Trade Center. For a while, almost five years ago, Manhattan was, in fact, the isle of the dead.

But mostly, I think, the novel was inspired by life, with its tug of sorrow on every joy. One day, the East River freezes over. Everyone in Brooklyn takes a holiday and walks to Manhattan. Hawkers sell candied pears on the river. Children skate across the ice. But, as Prue walks alongside her parents, she hears a melancholy exchange between them. Her father asks if they can't "try for a boy." He needs a son to take over the distillery. The mother says no. She's had six pregnancies; she's finished. For Prue, this is a blessed moment. It means that she will be taken into the business and have a life different from other women's. But this victory is banked in pain. Never mind the end of her parents' love life; Prue, however able she is as a businesswoman, will always be second best, because she is not male. Earlier in the day, Prue looked down at the ice covering the river. It was not white or smooth, but "a bumpy, dull gray, and dirty with ash, twigs, trapped fish, and bits of the week's papers." How casually those fish are mentioned, twitching and freezing as the happy Brooklynites tramp over them. They are the cousins of the six-toed kittens. For everything that prospers, something else is caught, and stopped.

But, if the bridge doesn't succeed in creating the hoped-for unity, the book does. "Brookland" itself is a kind of bridge, not just in its great span, from 1772 to 1823, and in its lattice of solid little parts—what the Winships eat for dinner (sweet-potato stew), how many dresses Prue has (one, brown)—but in its balance of opposing forces, above all, the forces within Prue's personality. "Brookland" is certainly a feminist novel, a child of "Little Women" and "The Song of the Lark," but, unlike the protagonists of those books, Prue is not a "natural." She isn't pretty. She's a worrywart; she's full of envy and remorse. She loves her family passionately, but she would trade them all for the bridge. The thing she loves best is her own mind, but she doesn't trust that, either. She is not a "good-models" feminist heroine, nor is she one of the bad-girl heroines of second-stage feminism. She is a thorny, struggling soul. Together with the book's profound treatment of the spiritual ills born of the Enlightenment, this wonderful character is Barton's main gift to us. ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Falmouth (Mass.) Enterprise.

An apparent dispute between neighbors on Homestead Lane turned ugly. Police were called to a home there at 8:23 AM where a man showed officers his red Toyota pickup truck. A cardboard cutout of a hand with an extended middle finger had been placed on the windshield. On the reverse side of the cutout, visible from inside the truck cab, were the words "you suck pond water." The man said he suspected his neighbor was the culprit because they had been arguing over money.

THE ART WORLD

RULE LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Hatshepsut, the king and queen.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

A thing is mysterious if you don't know what or how to feel about it, and wish you did. Mystery is a lack not of information but of meaning. Indeed, greater knowledge of certain subjects can intensify rather than soothe emotional itchiness about them, as witness the exhibition "Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh," at the Metropolitan Museum. Hatshepsut led Egypt for two decades, during one of its imperial peak periods, the Eighteenth Dynasty, close to thirty-five hundred years ago, first as regent for her stepson and nephew, Thutmose III, and then as the officially co-ruling but apparently unimpeded king—she assumes male attributes in her later depictions, including the distinctive headdress and ceremonial beard. (Evidence survives for just six female kings of Egypt; most of them, except Hatshepsut and, of course, Cleopatra, had reigns brief and obscure.) She governed well, by all accounts, and fostered copious, innovative art and architecture, exalting herself and her favorite gods. (Her hieroglyph-packed cartouches style her the Horus, Golden Horus, Two Ladies, Son of Re, Lord of the Two Lands, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Hatshepsut-united-with-Amun.) Why—and why no sooner than about twenty years after her death—did Thutmose III undertake to eliminate all trace of her, smashing statues, effacing inscriptions, and rewriting history with such vigor that her existence would be reëstablished only in the nineteenth century? That's a little mystery curled within the immense mystery that is ancient Egypt. If "the past is a foreign country," as Leslie Poles Hartley wrote, Egypt's is a foreign world. We thrill to it as children, our innocence a passport which age revokes.

Other bygone civilizations have their historians, scholars, and curators. Egypt has Egyptologists, a specialty with roots in ancient Egypt itself. Catharine H. Roehrig, of the Met's Department of Egyptian Art, who is the show's chief curator, remarked to me that Khaemwas, a son of Ramses II, who lived in the twelfth century B.C., deserves to be thought of as history's first archeologist, having undertaken expeditionary research into his country's already venerable and recondite past. (Roehrig said that she dates her own vocation to the gratifying success of an oral report on King Tut that she gave in the seventh grade.) It makes sense that the West's rediscovery of ancient Egypt coincided with the rise of the art museum. Egyptology provided forms, as well as material, for the new secular temples and repositories. Regarded in a certain light, ancient Egypt was a culture of living museums—incessantly maintained, periodically refurbished, and kept up to date with contemporary developments. The Egyptians were pertinacious keepers of lists, and recorders of methods and procedures. They meant for the things they made to last forever. Granted, the contents of a formerly sealed tomb are diminished when transferred to a windowless gallery, but a little effort of imagination makes good the loss. And a swarm of viewers on a weekend afternoon may lack the dignity of the religious processions which marked the Egyptian calendar, but those people, too, are united in a kind of devotion. As children, we get it. What grows on us after our childhoods, dolefully, is a sense of the overwhelming sovereignty of death, beyond the one wonderfully projected by the Egyptians for their own eternal habitation. When the tombs were broken open, there was no one to protest. Were there curses? If so, they didn't work, though we sometimes feel, guiltily, that they really should have.

The show presents almost three hundred objects—statues and reliefs, sarcophagi and architectural fragments,

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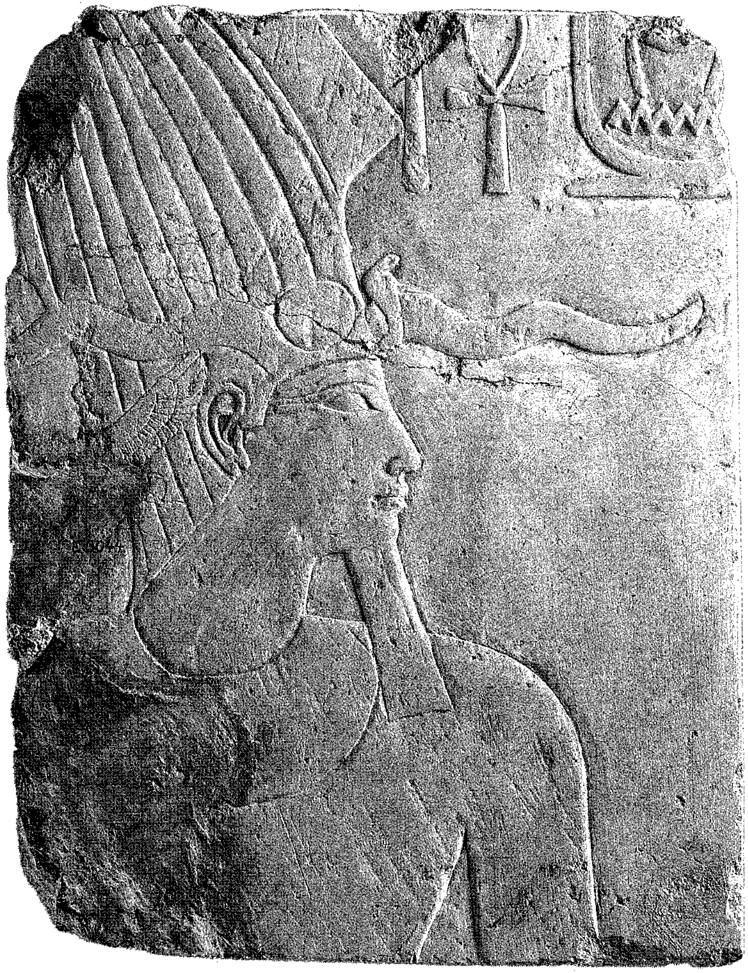
paintings and manuscripts, vessels and implements, jewelry and amulets—in spotlighted splendor, but it is both less opulent and a lot more interesting than the usual "Treasures of So-and-So" archeological exhibition. (People who rate these affairs by carat count may be mollified by the sumptuous loot from a tomb of three of Thutmose III's wives.)

The curators stick to their subject of the early New Kingdom, which began, circa 1550 B.C., when Ahmose I reunited Egypt after a spell of foreign domination in the north. Hatshepsut became regent upon the death of her husband and half brother, Thutmose II, in about 1479 B.C., and made herself king about six years later. Prominent in the show is Hatshepsut's courtier and Overseer of Works (among his many other titles), Senenmut, who may have designed her magnificent, peculiarly modern-looking mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri, with its succession of vast, colonnaded terraces that merge into a limestone cliffside across the Nile from Karnak. Was he the widow's lover, or her Walter Raleigh? No one knows. Statues show him tenderly holding the little princess Neferure, whom Hatshepsut may have groomed for high position. (Like Senenmut, she vanished from the records after Hatshepsut's death.) Thutmose III seemingly whiled away his subjugation in military exercise; he became one of history's most talented and prolific conquerors. Political caution might explain his long delay in obliterating his aunt/stepmother's memory, which remained lost until 1829, when Jean-François Champollion, the first person to successfully decipher hieroglyphs using the Rosetta stone, was surprised to note female suffixes in certain royal inscriptions at Deir el-Bahri, and detective work began. Most of the statues we have of Hatshepsut have been rescued from rubble found in buried pits at the site.



Hatshepsut reconfigured, after her death, as her half-brother husband.

COURTESY MUSÉES ROYAUX D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE, BRUSSELS

With a broad face, large-featured but for a dainty chin, Hatshepsut is no Nefertiti. Even in colossal statuary, she's more pleasant-looking than anything else—a woman whose appearance, except for over-the-top eye makeup, would startle no one in a Midwestern mall. The more formidable mien of Senenmut suggests that Hatshepsut was one to impose her will by cat's-paw. She often smiles slightly, projecting confident oneness with divinity: she was not only, like most pharaohs, an incarnation of the falcon-headed celestial deity, Horus, and a child of the sun god, Re, but also somehow physically a daughter of Amun, the Egyptian Zeus. (A fairly steamy inscription at Deir el-Bahri memorializes Amun's union with her mother, Queen Ahmose; he took the bodily form of Thutmose I, but certain beguiling odors gave him away.) Hatshepsut seems not to have advanced her many honorifics all at once. In Egypt, women not infrequently ruled as regents, with the title King's Mother, but Hatshepsut's ascent to full pharaohhood, with a legitimate male heir at hand, plainly called for an ideological campaign of considerable dexterity. What we see in her images at the Met is a shrewdly crafted cult of personality: Hatshepsut as a sitting monarch; as a kneeling or striding worshipper; and as a sphinx—all things to a grateful nation.

Some of the loveliest and the most absorbing pieces in the show are among the smallest. Two tiny items celebrate Senenmut and his special standing with Hatshepsut: a red carnelian amulet in the bovine form of Hathor (the goddess of love and beauty) and a white glass bead. They are inscribed with praise of the Pharaoh and, in the case of the amulet, "the hereditary prince and Great Steward of Amun"—a generous stretch, given that Senenmut was of relatively humble birth. Other objects—little boxes and baskets, charming vases in human or animal form, a chair with its original caning intact—might be the possessions of momentarily absent, living folks. Their air of easeful intimacy complicates the near-total alienness, for us, of the society that produced them. Come to that, the Egyptians can seem strangest in the matters that make them most likable. Throughout the decades of political and familial tumult covered by the show, for example, there's nary a hint that anybody indulged in the sensible expedient of murder—except symbolically. What kind of dynastic epic is that? Exceptionally blah material for a TV miniseries, certainly. But, then, we lack comparative data for what codes of behavior preserve a state for four thousand years. ♦

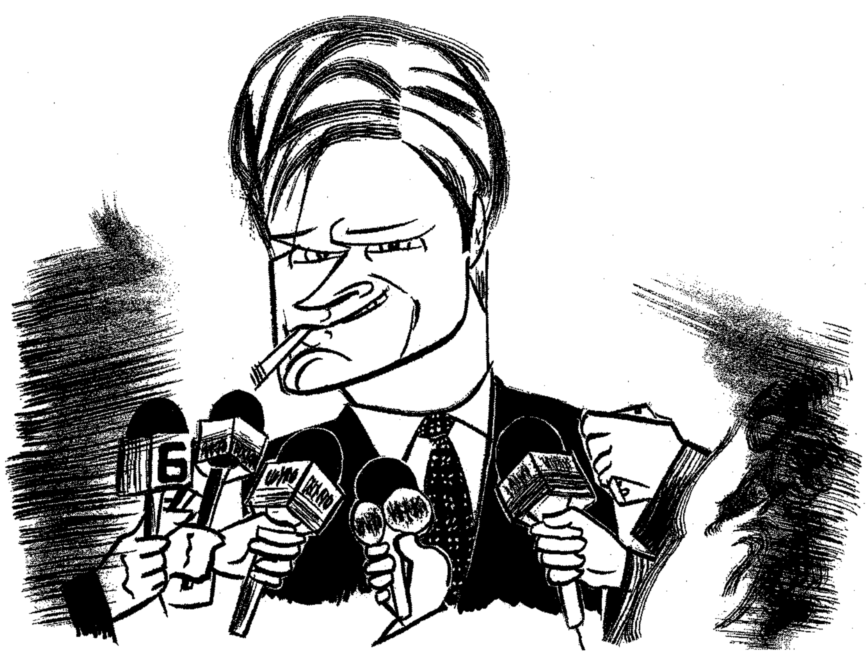
THE CURRENT CINEMA

TOBACCO AND DRUGS

"Thank You for Smoking" and "Brick."

BY DAVID DENBY

Cigarette smoking naturally turns many of us into frothing moralists. How can we tolerate an industry, we ask, that glamorizes poison? That's the kind of sentiment that gets carved up into little pieces by Nick Naylor (Aaron Eckhart), the hero of "Thank You for Smoking." The chief spokesman for the tobacco lobby in Washington, Nick is a mixture of swagger and impudent candor. He knows that his arguments in favor of smoking are rubbish, but he enjoys the game of spin too much to give it up. As he explains to his young son, Joey (Cameron Bright), in this line of work the goal is not to be right but to dominate the conversation. If you put your opponent on the defensive, if you drown his claims with "facts" of your own, you will win the media battle. Adapting Christopher Buckley's satirical 1994 novel, Jason Reitman (the son of the director and producer Ivan Reitman) maintains a juicily ambiguous tone. Nick sells an addictive pleasure with appeals to freedom of choice. He may have a point about personal responsibility (is there anyone left who doesn't yet know of smoking's dangers?), but he is also a master of such rhetorical shell games as the strategically selective lab report and the brazenly misleading syllogism. Nick is the intellectual equivalent of the golden-maned bruisers in professional wrestling—he's magnetically villainous. In the person of Aaron Eckhart, he makes lying a lot sexier than telling the truth: Nick's antagonist, the clear-thinking, anti-smoking Senator Ortolan Finistirre (William H. Macy), of Vermont, wears Birkenstocks and keeps novelty bottles of maple syrup in his office.



Aaron Eckhart as Nick Naylor, a spokesman for the tobacco lobby.

TOM BACHTEL

"Thank You for Smoking" is a nifty but slight movie. Some of the writing is obvious, and the dramatic structure is flimsy, if not downright arbitrary. But Eckhart, in a sure-handed performance, holds the picture together. Almost a decade ago, in Neil LaBute's "In the Company of Men," Eckhart was the unspeakable Chad, who played dirty tricks on a deaf woman as a way of gaining revenge on the female sex. Eckhart made Chad so consistently vile that I imagined he might be one of those rare honorable actors who, playing a creep, refuse to separate themselves from the character they're exposing to our view. I wondered where Eckhart would go. Not all that far, it turned out. As the bearded and saintly biker absorbing Julia Roberts's shock waves in "Erin Brockovich" (2000), he was unable to display any of his distinctive qualities of malevolent charm, and, in later LaBute projects, he didn't come through as forcefully as he had in "Men." But now he's got a breakthrough role. Eckhart has a smile a yard wide, a square jaw, and a thatch of Redfordish blond hair, but he's a bit cross-eyed, and when that grin spreads across his face you wonder if he's happy or just gloating. Cinema desperately needs stars at the moment, and his off-kilter good looks and mildly unsavory persona fill the screen. Here and there in "Smoking," as he was swinging his body around and tearing through Nick's specious arguments, I thought of the hustling young Tony Curtis and also of Kirk Douglas, who played mesmerizing, hyped-up bastards in movies like "The Bad and the Beautiful." Douglas was always clenched and humorless; Eckhart has his panache (and his cleft chin), but he also knows how to relax onscreen. If he gets the scripts he deserves, he could rival George Clooney for the smart-guy parts.

There is a trend in which industries try to get out ahead of their critics by presenting themselves as doing more for the public welfare than their critics are—as when liquor companies caution their patrons not to drink and drive. Reitman, picking up on the sallies in Buckley's novel, takes that trend a step farther. Nick announces on television a fifty-million-dollar ad campaign to persuade kids not to smoke. This renunciation, of course, is the last thing the tobacco companies want from kids, but they must appear to want it. The movie suggests that Americans deserve to be spun by ploys like this; they're too weak-minded, too distractible, not to be taken. The funniest bit of satire in the movie is the regular meetings, in a lugubrious K Street pub, of three friends who call themselves the MOD Squad. (The initials stand for "merchants of death.") Besides Nick, there's the beautiful wine-and-spirits spieler (Maria Bello) and the patriotic and gleefully murderous gun spokesman (David Koechner). The sin lobbyists are proud of their public misdeeds; they boast of their outrageous shucks while competing in lethality. Nick, with his twelve hundred deaths a day caused by cigarette smoking, wins hands down. Like all successful satirists, Reitman relishes and celebrates his bad guys. The tobacco kingpin who is Nick's boss (Robert Duvall), moldering in Winston-Salem in baronial splendor, utters vicious remarks in the most courtly Southern tones. Slow-talking and immobile, Duvall still sends out sparks of energy. (He may be thinking, I get to play the Godfather at last.) Out in Hollywood, where Nick goes to seek a better image for smoking in movies, he meets a big-deal agent (Rob Lowe) and his sycophantic assistant (Adam Brody). Lowe and Brody, slender as reeds, are masters of a talent agency that, with its white-on-white décor and Zen trappings, looks suspiciously like C.A.A.; they offer the perfect Hollywood combination of reflexive pleasantness and insolent contempt. The scene is only a riff, but Reitman, someday, could do a dandy satire of his workplace.

At this point, one wants him to toughen up and hit harder. There are lovely touches in "Smoking," like the opening-credits sequence, in which the names of the cast members are planted amid the crowns and crests of old cigarette packaging—a nostalgically ironic evocation of smoking's glory years. But the plotting of "Smoking" feels formulaic. Nick sleeps with an opportunistic reporter from "the Washington *Probe*" (Katie Holmes), who spills his pillow talk into a front-page exposé, and his life goes into a tailspin. Eckhart is just as good at dissolute self-contempt as he is at studly confidence, but the movie takes a tiresome turn when Nick lugs his spookily articulate son around with him in an attempt to hold on to the kid's affection. Nick doesn't need redemption; we like him just fine as a louse.

"Brick," a low-budget movie shot in twenty days and edited on a home computer, has a rapturous sheen to it. Part of the movie's aura will come from the people likely to watch it—an audience happily stoned on the sweetish, camphorated redolence of old movie gestures, loyalties, and modes of behavior. The first-time director, Rian Johnson, spent six years raising money from family and friends to pull off his dream project, a Dashiell Hammett-style whodunnit. But in Johnson's version of film noir the inexorable Sam Spade-type detective is a mop-headed high-school student wearing a sweatshirt and wire-framed glasses, and the setting is not the nighttime big city of Hollywood imagination—the usual claustrophobic noir precinct—but the preposterously sunny skies and wide-open spaces of San Clemente, California. The hero, Brendan (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), receives a desperate phone call from an old girlfriend, Emily (Emilie de Ravin), who then disappears. Brendan finds her dead body at the mouth of a sewage tunnel, and, realizing that she had fallen into the hands of a student drug gang (led by an off-campus crime boss named the Pin), insinuates himself into the gang and turns the members of it against one another. At the same time, he tells off the school's assistant vice-principal, just the way Bogart used to sass the cops who cramped his style. The convolutions of the story are hard to follow in the manner of "The Maltese Falcon" and "The Big Sleep," and the characters, lounging against the blank outside wall of the school, speak in cryptic jive patter ("Bulls would only gum it"; i.e., "Cops are dumb"). They say their words quickly, casually, and, if you don't get half the burble, it doesn't matter. The situations and the talk may be a joke, but the emotions are real—we're in high school, where friendships and loyalty, and who's tough and who's cool, count for everything.

"Brick" is often quite funny, and not in a campy or condescending way—that is, not because the distance from the original models is laughable. If anything, you are likely to think, This kind of story still works because it has an unshakable internal logic. Yes, the knight in shining armor must walk down those mean streets; he must act like a criminal, enter the underworld (in this case, a suburban basement with prefab panelling), get himself beaten up, outsmart everyone, and, in the end, give us the pleasures of sin and of justice at the same time. Part of the enjoyment is our knowledge that "Brick" was concocted by Hollywood kids on a serious lark, making use of a glorious strand of their inheritance. All in all, this twerpy little movie is one of the most entertaining pictures to be released so far this year. ♦

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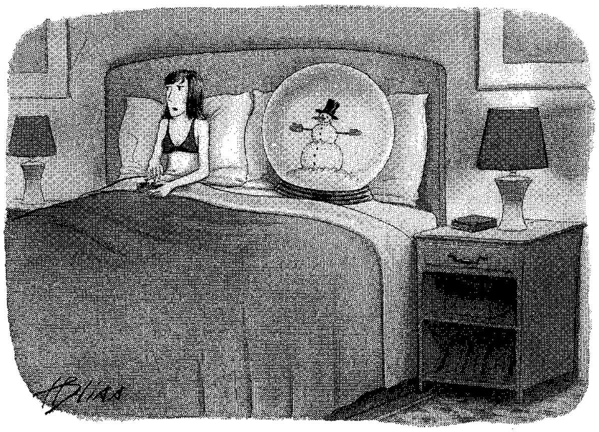
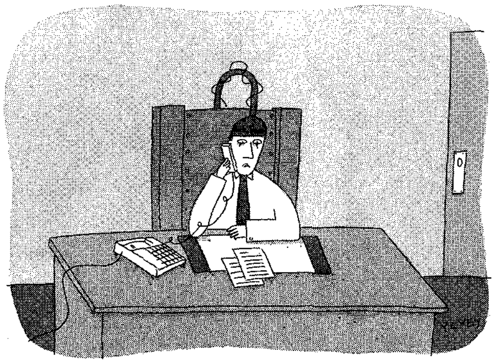
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Alex Gregory, must be received by Sunday, April 2nd. Finalists in the March 20th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 17th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Well, that was abominable."
Carl Gable, Norcross, Ga.



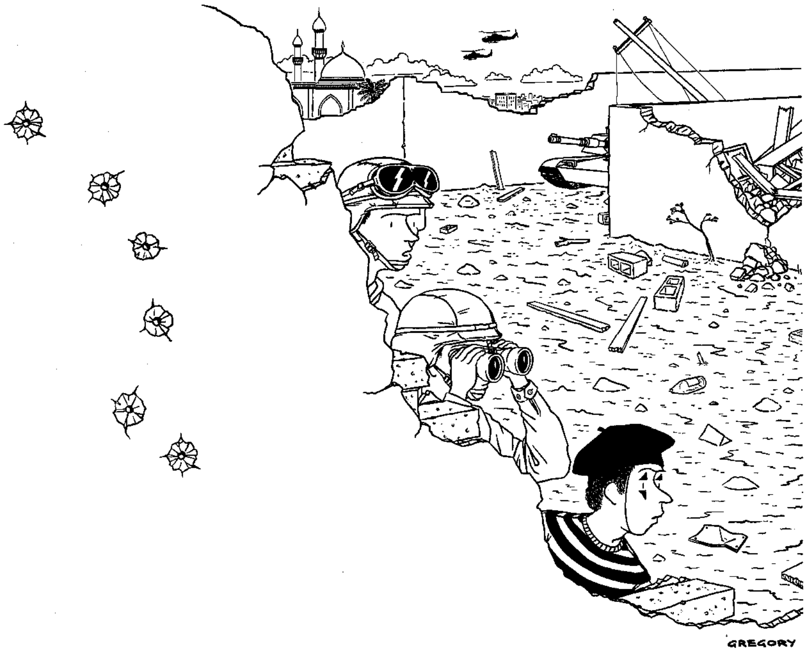
THE FINALISTS

"Cancel my twelve-oh-one."
Richard Nathanson, New York City

"I can't talk, I'm expecting a call from the governor . . . wait, I could save how much?"
Andrew Blanda, Rochester, N.Y.

"Yes, Mother, I know I should have started my appeal earlier."
Paul Boyer, Schenectady, N.Y.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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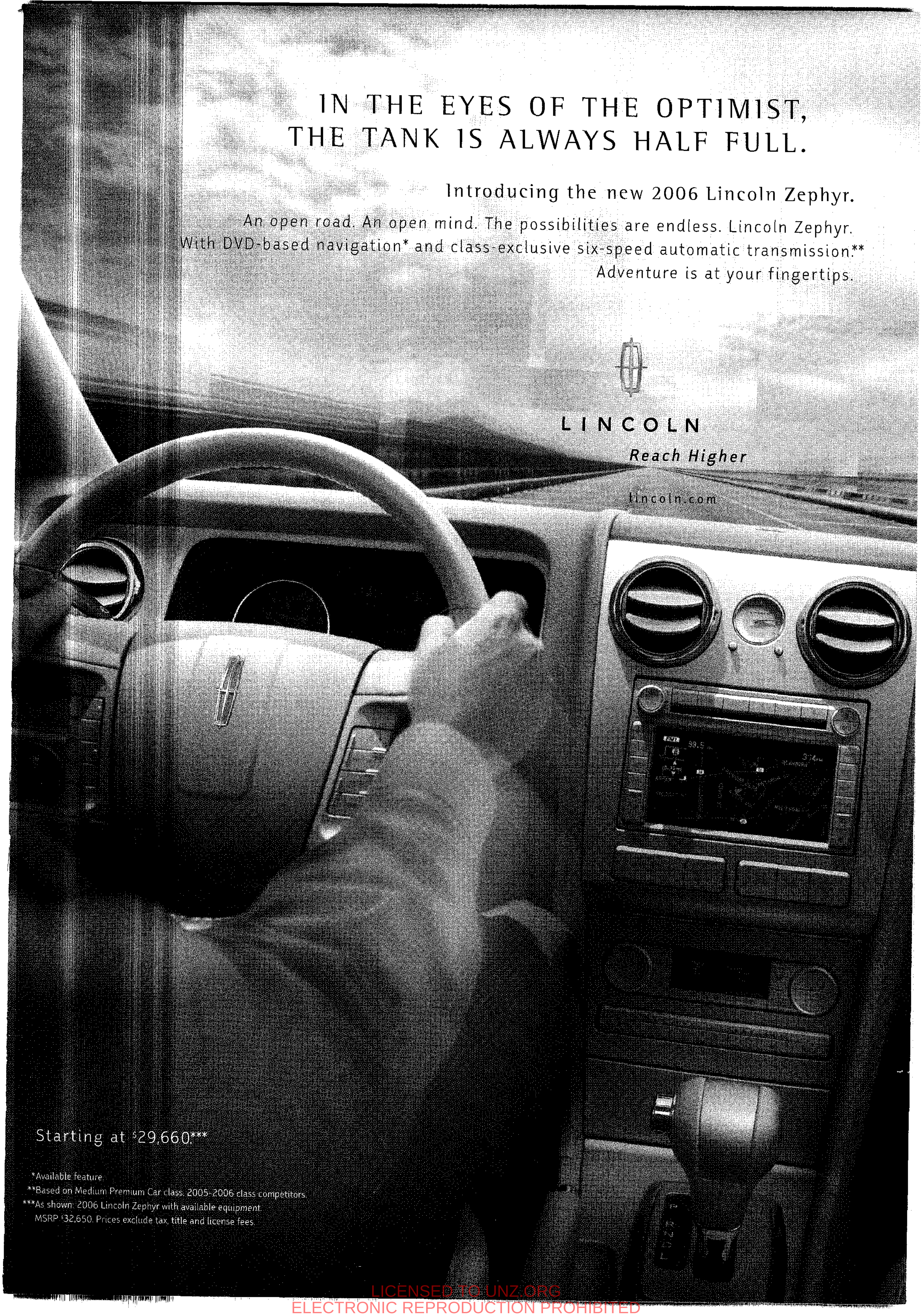IN THE EYES OF THE OPTIMIST,
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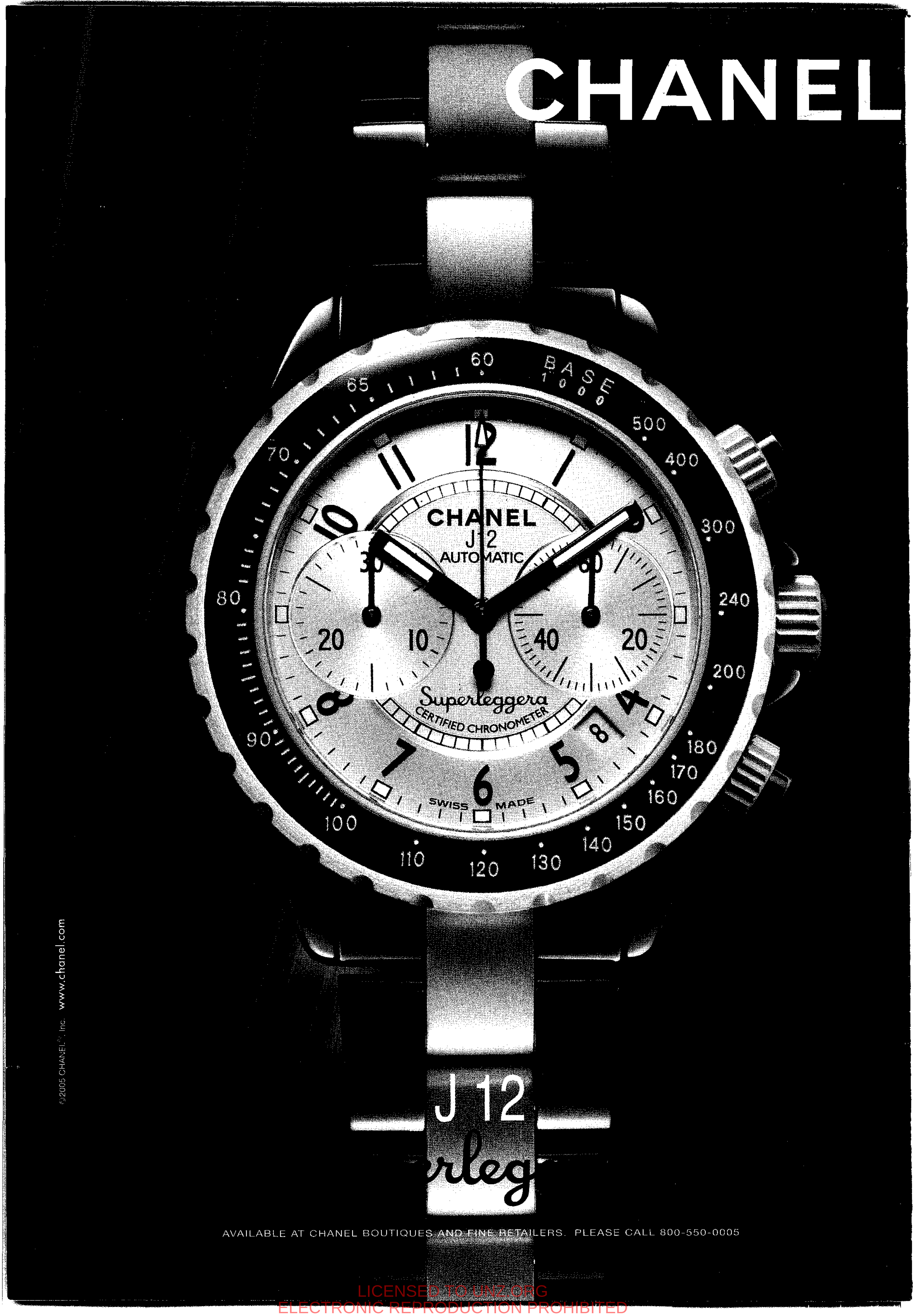
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